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# **Exploring child-led research: Case studies from Bangladesh, Lebanon and Jordan**

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**PhD Social Policy  
The University of Edinburgh  
2018**



## Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.



Patricio Cuevas-Parra

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# Acronyms

CESESMA	Centre for Education in Health and Environment
HCC	Higher Council for Childhood
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
MNCR	Manara Network for Child Rights
NCFA	National Council for Family Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPA	National Plan of Action
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WV	World Vision

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# Abstract

The right to participate and express a view is an intrinsic right afforded to all human beings, regardless of age (Lundy, 2007). Explicitly, Articles 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) grant participatory rights to children and young people in decision-making. One of the forms of participation academics and practitioners have studied over the past decades, the engagement of children and young people in participatory processes, is moving away from the understanding of children as passive recipients of research to active participants. However, literature has paid scant attention to research led directly by children and young people (Thomas, 2015). Child-led research is understood, as starting definition from literature, as an approach in which children and young people are involved in all stages – from planning, fieldwork and analysis to dissemination.

The aim of this research is to critically explore how the process and outcomes of children and young people's participation in their own child-led research contributes, positively or negatively, to decision-making processes in the context of international development programmes. The research questions are:

**Question 1:** What are children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research as a way to influence decision-making?

**Question 2:** What are the processes of child-led research that positively or negatively influence decision-making?

**Question 3:** In what ways does child-led research influence decision-making? (And why and how do they do so?)

This research project used a case study approach to examine two cases where children and young people claimed they conducted child-led research. The first, *Bekaa and Irbid*, investigated the research conducted by a group of children and young people on issues relevant to their situations as refugees in the host countries of Lebanon and Jordan. The second, *Dhaka*, reviewed child-led research focused on the lack of birth certificates issued for Bangladeshi children and the possible effects of not having this legal registration. A group of children and young people who are members of a Children's Parliament in Dhaka led this project.

The research participants for this project are defined as (1) the children and young people, aged 12 to 18 (when I interviewed them), who are associated with World Vision programmes and engaged in the child-led research projects within their constituencies in the *Irbid and Bekaa* and *Dhaka* case studies and (2) the adult professionals who acted as facilitators of child-led research projects and those who worked in the design of these projects or dissemination of their findings. These participants were those who were best suited to provide the information needed as they were fully involved in the child-led research projects and had in-depth knowledge to contribute answers to the research questions. This project adopted several methods for data collection, including focus groups, semi-structured interviews, observations and documentary review.

The study followed ethical research guidelines to ensure the safety, rights, dignity and well-being of both the children and young people and adult participants (Morrow, 2009). The research took into account the special considerations required to gain informed consent, ensure confidentiality and anonymity, acknowledge the

cultures of the research sites, and refrain from presenting information that may potentially harm participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

The findings of the study show that the child-led research approach is considered an adequate participatory approach that creates spaces for children and young people to engage in their own research and influence change based on their findings. Thus, this approach enabled participants to gather together and pursue collectively a research project in which they were able to explore issues about their lives using research methodologies that were appropriate to their experiences, abilities and expertise. This conversation, however, highlights a variety of tensions around the understanding and legitimacy of child-led research.

Findings from this study supports the view that child-led research generates empirically grounded knowledge, which produced through data collection and personal experiences of the young researches and its analysis as a whole. Findings also reveal that the young researchers' motivations and expectations were to make an impact on their own lives, as well as the lives of their peers and change a situation that they perceived as unfair. Findings show that the adult facilitators played an important role in facilitating the young researchers but not managing them. However, this study evidenced some tensions between participation and protection rights. The study found manifestations of power amongst the children and young people during the child-led research projects, which were based on age, gender, religion, language and ethnicity. This confirms children and young people can replicate power relations within their participatory projects, which are deeply embedded in their traditions and cultures. Findings show that child-led research has



different levels of impact; on decision-making and in the individual lives of the young researchers. This is connected to the contexts where children and young people conducted their research, which was conducive in one case study and more challenging in the other case.

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the body of literature that challenges the dominant conceptualisation that children and young people are unable to conduct their own research. Instead, the findings of this research project contribute to the study of children and young people's participation by providing different perspectives on the debate around the children and young people's abilities and motivations to engage in their own child-led research projects. The findings contribute to knowledge about the nature of child-led research as an approach that supports children and young people in their struggle to participate in society. These findings contribute to the substantial gap of understanding about what is knowledge and expertise by exploring the ways in which children and young people conduct their own research and create knowledge with the aim of making a change in society. Specifically, the findings provide empirical evidence of the impact that their work has had on policy and practice and their personal lives.

# CHAPTER

# ONE

## 1. Introduction

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### 1.1. Introduction

This PhD project explores the concept of children and young people's participation in the context of how they conduct their own child-led research. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), brings a new status to children and young people by recognising them as subjects of rights who are entitled to be heard and participate in decision-making processes (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Article 12 involves a substantial shift in the nature of the relationships between adults and children and young people as they are granted, for the first time in history, the right to participate (Verhellen, 2000). The UNCRC brings a particular understanding of children and young people's participation by connecting the rights to express views freely and have their views given due weight with other rights outlined in the convention, such as the freedom of expression, freedom of association and access to information (Tisdall, 2013).

Traditionally, the norm for most research on children's issues was for adults to lead studies; children and young people were unlikely to be involved as respondents, data-collectors or lead researchers (Fleming, 2011). However, over the last 20 years, academia and researchers have embraced new approaches to undertaking research with children and young people rather than on them (Alderson, 2008). The use of adults as respondents on behalf of children has shifted to methodologies that progressively value the incorporation of children and young people as legitimate informants in research. Moreover, new waves of scholars are promoting the inclusion of children and young people in research processes as collaborators, advisors or peer researchers. However, despite advances in including children in research, literature has paid scant attention to research led directly by children and young people (Thomas, 2015).

In this project, child-led research is understood, as starting definition from the literature, to be research in which children and young people are involved in all stages – from planning, fieldwork and analysis to dissemination (e.g. Kellett, 2005; Franks, 2011; Spalding, 2012; Kim, 2016). This process may or may not include adults as facilitators and supporters. For those who work to promote children and young people's participation in decision-making, child-led research provides avenues to offer children and young people spaces and opportunities to participate in collective decision-making (Shier, 2015). Even though enthusiasm for engaging children and young people as researchers is growing the notion of child-led research still needs to be problematised in order to define its scope and boundaries. This research project seeks to explore whether child-led research, conducted on issues that participants

agree upon, enhances children and young people's opportunities to participate in the public arena and contributes to influencing decision-making.

## **1.2. Reflecting on previous experiences and practices**

My professional experience in international development programmes influenced this research project, which focuses specifically on children and young people's participation in advocacy work. Over the last 25 years, I have worked in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe and travelled to more than 40 countries to mentor and supervise local advocacy and child participation teams. My major focus has been to mainstream children and young people's participation into international development, advocacy and humanitarian response programmes. Over time, I have become particularly interested in child-led research as an approach to enhance children and young people's collective participation.

Based on my professional background, I am very interested in exploring new avenues for research on the intersection of children and young people's participation and their impact on decision-making processes. My extensive work with children and young people shows me that they are eager to participate in public spaces and shape the decisions that have an impact on their daily lives. This line of thought is consistent with other research that demonstrates that children and young people are active players in the construction of their lives and societies and able to develop their own views and opinions within specific contexts (e.g. Mayall, 2000; James and James, 2004; Wyness, 2009; Spyrou, 2011; Alderson, 2012).

However, children and young people experience enormous limitations, discriminatory practices and exclusions that prevent them from exercising their right to participate. The reality is that many children and young people's lives, especially those who face poverty, discrimination, or the consequences of disasters, are not conducive to being acknowledged as active participants in social life. Within this context, I was keen to explore the way in which children and young people's right to be heard can be reflected through their participation in policy and practice arenas. I also want to examine the opportunities and constraints they face when engaged in their own research process to influence decision-making. I am particularly interested in examining the engagement of children and young people and how they use their findings to influence decision-making process on matters relevant to them.

The aim of this research is to critically explore how the process and outcomes of children and young people's participation in their own child-led research contributes, positively or negatively, to decision-making processes in the context of international development programmes. The research questions are:

**Question 1:** What are children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research as a way to influence decision-making?

**Question 2:** What are the processes of child-led research that positively or negatively influence decision-making?

**Question 3:** In what ways does child-led research influence decision-making? (And why and how do they do so?)

This research project used a case study approach to examine two cases where children and young people claimed they conducted child-led research, managing their projects from the conceptualisation of research questions to the dissemination of their findings. The first case study, *Bekaa and Irbid*, investigated the research conducted by a group of children and young people on issues relevant to their situations as refugees in the host countries of Lebanon and Jordan. The second, *Dhaka*, reviewed child-led research focused on the lack of birth certificates issued for Bangladeshi children and the possible effects of not having this legal registration. A group of children and young people who are members of a Children's Parliament in Dhaka led this project.

The research participants for my research project are defined as (1) the children and young people, aged 12 to 18 (when I interviewed them), who were associated with World Vision programmes and engaged in the child-led research projects within their constituencies in the *Irbid and Bekaa* and *Dhaka* case studies and (2) the adult professionals who acted as facilitators of child-led research projects and those who worked in the design of these projects or dissemination of their findings. These participants are those who were best suited to provide the information needed as they were fully involved in the child-led research projects, had in-depth knowledge to contribute answers to the research questions. This project adopted several methods for data collection including; focus groups, semi-structured interviews, observations and documentary review. This decision was made on the premise that having multiple sources of evidence help to fully answer the research questions and cover a broad range of topics (Yin, 2014), as one method helps to

explore initial issues or illuminate aspects that are hidden but that could be elucidated using other techniques (Lewis and McNaughton, 2014).

The two case studies are part of international development programmes. For many child-focused international development organisations, children and young people's participation has become a central strategy component, leading to the development of action plans, tools and methodologies to operationalise the key principles outlined in the UNCRC (e.g. Tearfund, 2004; UNICEF, 2006; Plan International, 2010; Save the Children, 2010; World Vision, 2015). This move has opened up new avenues for children and young people's participation, which has gained considerable space and visibility in a variety of settings from national practices and programmes to global policies (Tisdall, 2013). However, despite these promising practices, children and young people who live in poverty or conflict-prone areas still often experience severe limitations to their participatory rights. These restrictions are due more to the harsh contexts where they live rather than their inability to participate and engage in decision-making processes (Hart, 2008).

Evidence shows that there are gaps in our knowledge and understanding in child-led research, which need further examination. This will lead to the generation of new data and a better understanding by practitioners and policy-level stakeholders of children and young people's contributions to decision-making processes. This study aims to fill the gap between literature and practice and provide knowledge regarding child-led research that has not been widely documented.

### 1.3. Definitions of key concepts and terms

This section outlines some concepts that are critical components of this research project.

- **Children and young people:** This research uses the term “children and young people” to refer to individuals who are under 18 years, as defined by the UNCRC. This phrase respects the reality that many older children prefer the category “young people” to “children”. Wyness (2006) points out that the ages and age ranges are a contested area, especially when defining the boundaries between childhood, youth and adulthood, but using the UNCRC’s legal definition helps to define childhood as a period below the age of 18. In this research, most participants were children and young people aged 12 to 18. Many referred to themselves as children, due to the influence of the UNCRC, but others preferred to call themselves young people.
- **Children and young people’s participation:** I used the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s (2009, para.3) definition of participation. They describe it as “ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes”.
- **Childhood:** Childhood embraces two concepts; one is the period of life that separates children from adults, defined in many countries based on age. The second refers to childhood as a socially constructed category (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). This research project embraces an understanding of childhood that



suggests that the childhood experience is not universal and differs across times and contexts from one society and culture to another (Prout, 2011).

- **Childhood studies:** This research is located within the academic field of childhood studies, which was initially called sociology of childhood and then transitioned to childhood studies. This field is “the interdisciplinary study of the early period of the human life-course that is legally recognised and socially (as well as, in part, scientifically) defined as childhood, as distinct from adulthood” (James and James, 2012, p18). Childhood studies position children and young people as competent social actors. James and James (2012) argue that the conceptualisation of children and young people as social subjects has been pivotal in the development of methods that involve children and young people as active participants in research and as researchers themselves.
- **Child-led research:** As a starting definition based on the existing literature, child-led research can be defined as “research that children design, carry out and disseminate themselves with adult support rather than adult management” (Kellett, 2010, 195).
- **Young researchers:** This project uses Shier’s (2015) classification of young researchers as children and young people under the age of 18 who engage in all stages of a research project and receive effective facilitation processes, methodologies and technical support.
- **Practitioner:** A practitioner is an adult professional who has studied and gained qualifications to work directly with children and young people as a facilitator or in a similar capacity.

- **International development:** This project uses Harvard Law School's definition, which states that international development "encompasses a broad range of disciplines and endeavours to improve the quality of life of people around the world. It includes both economic and social development and encompasses many issues such as humanitarian and foreign aid, poverty alleviation, the rule of law and governance, food and water security, capacity building, healthcare and education, women and children's rights, disaster preparedness, infrastructure, and sustainability" (Greiman, 2011, p8).
- **World Vision:** World Vision is a development, humanitarian and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice (World Vision, 2013). Founded in 1950, World Vision is the largest international non-governmental organisation (INGO) working in international development. World Vision is a federated network of 87 country offices with 45,632 employees and a total revenue of US\$2.67 billion as of 2014 (World Vision, 2016). World Vision works in urban and rural areas, where they employ local staff to develop relationships with families, community members and local partners. The organisation does this in order to strengthen communities, empower children and young people and improve the well-being of vulnerable children in the most important aspects of their lives (World Vision, 2016). World Vision's strategic mandate is to excel in the creation of and advocacy for enabling environments that empower children and young people as social actors, advocates and partners for child well-being (World Vision, 2015).

## **1.4. Thesis structure**

Following Chapter One, Chapter Two (Literature Review), covers the main theoretical perspectives on children and young people's participation and establishes the substantial themes, debates, models and practices relevant to this research project. It includes discussions on the tensions between theory, policy and practice on children and young people's participation, with a special focus on the engagement of children and young people in conducting their own research on issues pertinent to their lives. This chapter begins by exploring global policy perspectives and conceptualisations of children and young people's participation. I then link these notions to the foundational principles of childhood studies. The final sections discuss children and young people's engagement in research as a participatory practice to generate knowledge and influence decision-making. It concludes by connecting the disciplines that have contributed to the debate of children and young people's engagement in research.

Chapter Three, Methodology, discusses the aim of this project, introduces the research questions and outlines the methodological procedures adopted for this study. It presents the ontological and epistemological perspectives underpinning this research examination and describe how my personal experiences and perspectives influenced the methodology and approaches adopted. By using a reflexive account, the chapter also explores my personal position in the research process and how I dealt with my own identity and perspective whilst shaping the project. This chapter then introduces the study's design, discusses the decision to use a case study approach and reviews the theoretical contexts that informed the project. After

examining the characteristics of the selected case studies and research participants, I make an argument for the data collection methods selected for this qualitative research. In Chapter Four, situating the case studies in the Lebanese, Jordanian and Bangladeshi contexts, I offer a brief review of the settings where the studies were undertaken and outline the political, socioeconomic and cultural contexts. This chapter explores national policies that had an impact on the children and young people's participation in Lebanon and Jordan (*Bekaa and Irbid* case study) and Bangladesh (*Dhaka* case study). The chapter then delves into the local and national political environments, the framing of these contexts in the case studies and any consequences on the children and young people's participation during their child-led research.

In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I present the research findings. In Chapter Five, I discuss how the participants in both case studies defined and experienced child-led research. The chapter critically explores how child-led research contributes to knowledge generation and analyses how this connects to the expertise that children and young people already have in their lives. I conclude by deeming the conceptualisation of child-led research to be a legitimate and feasible participatory project that facilitates children and young people's engagement in knowledge generation on issues relevant to their lives.

The focus for Chapter Six is an exploration of how the young researchers used their findings to raise the issues important to them and measure the impact of these reports on their decision-making influence. I then discuss how the children and young people engaged in knowledge exchange strategies to disseminate their findings as a

means to strengthen their participation in decision-making processes relevant to their research topics. The findings contrast the different kinds of impacts made by the child-led research on the particular case studies and their contributions to social change, according to the different contexts.

Moving to Chapter Seven, the multifaceted relationships between the staff members and children and young people during the child-led research projects are examined. Throughout the chapter, I discuss the emotional bonds, authority and negotiation processes, which together construct and reconstruct the meanings of these relationships, and the ways they act and interact. I then explore how the relational practices between adult facilitators and children and young people have an impact on the processes and outcomes of participatory research projects, especially those that claim to be child-led. The discussion also touches on some tensions between the young researchers themselves and how power relations were negotiated and addressed. Chapter Eight concludes this thesis. I summarise the findings of my study by answering each research question and discussing the implications that arose from this research for policy, practice and further exploration.

# CHAPTER

## TWO

## 2. Literature review

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### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces theoretical perspectives on children and young people's participation and establishes the substantial themes, debates, models and practices that are relevant to the topic of this research project. The tensions that theory, policy and practice pose to children and young people's participation is discussed with a special focus on their engagement in their own research on issues pertinent to their lives. Firstly, this chapter explores conceptualisations of children and young people's participation from global policy perspectives and then turns to link these notions to the foundational principles of the sociology of childhood, referred to more commonly as childhood studies, which has brought together the attention to childhood as a social construction and children and young people as competent social actors. This section discusses how these childhood sociological paradigms enter in tension with the universal standards embraced by the UNCRC and how these tensions are reconciled by recognising a diversity of childhoods across societies and historical times.

This section then engages in a discussion around the gaps between recognising children and young people as social actors and the diversity of social structures and relationships that have an impact on the understanding of childhood in general and participation in particular. In doing so, the chapter explores the multifaceted categories and diversity of experiences that children and young people have and the impact that those have in their lives. I then touch on some of the influential typologies of children and young people's participation and how these have been used to translate theory into practice. In the final sections of the chapter, I focus on the engagement of children and young people in research as a participatory practice to generate knowledge and influence decision-making. This section makes links between the disciplines that have also contributed to the debate of children and young people's engagement in research and explores contested themes such as the abilities of children and young people to create knowledge and how this helps them to influence change in their lives.

## **2.2. Conceptualising children and young people's participation**

In the history of humanity, children and young people have participated at different levels of society from labour to entertainment to school, but an understanding of their participation has evolved according to the changes in historical and cultural contexts (Corsaro, 2011). For instance, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz who was born in 1651 in Mexico, went against rules that banned girls from studying and became a poetry writer at the age of 10, and the two girls who famously protested against child labour and child slavery in the 1909 in New York City Labour Day parade (CLASS,

2012), are examples that indicate that children and young people's participation did not start with the proclamation of the UNCRC in 1989. Moreover, as Tisdall (2015) points out "the UNCRC galvanised adults to recognise children and young people's right to participate, as part of a broader human rights agenda" (p185). Explicitly, the UNCRC recognises the participatory rights of children and young people up to the age of 18 in a range of international human rights treaties and instruments and guarantees that the right to participate is an intrinsic right afforded to all human beings, regardless of age (Lundy, 2007). Article 12 of the UNCRC includes two pivotal rights: the right to express a view and the right to have the view given due weight. It is framed as follows:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

The right to express a view freely means that children and young people have the right to express relevant perspectives and experiences in order to influence decision-making (Tisdall, 2015). By including "freely", Article 12 also indicates that expressing a view is a choice, not an obligation, and should be coercion-free (Lundy, 2007). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter, "the Committee") further



dictates a requirement for State Parties to listen to the views of children and young people and facilitate their participation in all matters affecting them, including within their families, schools, institutions and judicial procedures (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

The right to have one's views given due weight implies that children and young people should be able to express their views in many different ways without restriction on age or maturity – and their opinions should be recognised based on their ability to form a view (Lundy, 2007). However, Archard (2005) suggests that the article's wording and a State's interpretation of due weight in relationship to a child's age and maturity could lead to the restriction of children and young people's right to express a view. Conversely, Lundy (2007) argues that the reference to due weight in Article 12 does not imply a duty for children and young people to prove their maturity in order to give their views; but, on the contrary, implies that State Parties and decision makers have an obligation to ensure the implementation of this right by listening to the view of children and young people and finding the best ways for them to express their opinions.

As with all human rights treaties, UNCRC articles need to be analysed in conjunction with other provisions. Archard (2005) argues that Article 12, as part of a particular set of rights that aim to enhance children and young people's participation, has to be read and interpreted in connection with other participatory rights, including the principle of non-discrimination (Article 2), freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14), freedom of association (Article 15), protection of privacy (Article 16) and access to information

(Article 17). Furthermore, these participation articles also need to be read together with the best interests of the child (Article 3) and parental guidance (Article 5). However, questions and criticisms have been raised about the contradictions between Article 12, Articles 3 and 5. Freeman (2011) argues that Articles 3 and 5 could lead to a paternalistic analysis of Article 12 and undermine or limit the rights of children and young people's participation based on the sole judgment of adults or parents if the obligation to take into account the best interest of the child and the role of parents to provide the child appropriate direction supersede the participation rights of children and young people. Furthermore, as Lundy and McEvoy (2011) point out, the implementation of Article 12 has been problematic because it requires adults' cooperation, who could have a dissenting view of this right and limit children and young people's use and understanding of their rights. However, despite the tension between Articles 12, 3 and 5, the UNCRC General Comments has established higher standards in terms of participation than has been set out in other human rights treaties. They address "the legal and social status of children, who, on the one hand lack the full autonomy of adults but, on the other, are subjects of rights" (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, para.1).

Certainly, Article 12 and its two key component; the right to express a view and the right to have that view given due weight, have had a substantial impact on children and young people's opportunities to participate in social life. However, Tisdall (2015) argues that, despite its influence, Article 12 is not as radical as it appears. She points out that the article does not recognise a right to vote, does not grant self-determination or autonomy nor does it prioritise a child's views over their

best interests, allowing adults to decide for children and young people what care is in their best interest.

As Article 12 does not outline a definition of participation, the Committee provided a comprehensive interpretation of participatory rights in their General Comment No. 12, defining children and young people' participation as an:

...ongoing process, which includes information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, para.3)

In this, the General Comment shapes a definition that contrasts with the notion of participation as merely taking part in or being present at activities and offers perspectives in which children and young people are entitled to participate in decision-making processes on issues that have an impact on their lives (Tisdall, 2014). In this context, the definition includes a decision-making feature that implies the potential presence of a collective component, which requires not only individual but collective participation of children and young people, where groups of individuals seek to influence decision-making and bring about change (Burke, 2010).

The Committee emphasises that the implementation of the right to participate requires the inclusion of several minimum prerequisites, such as preparation, hearing, assessment of capacity, feedback and remedies and redress, in order to ensure that participation is aligned with the principles of Article 12 (UN

Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Furthermore, the Committee emphasises that children and young people's views "should be considered in decision-making, policymaking and preparation of laws and/or measures as well as their evaluation" (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, para.12). However, the inclusion of decision-making as an integral feature of participation does not mean that children and young people are the final decision makers but denotes that they are taking part with the knowledge that their actions will be taken into account and may be acted upon (Boyden and Ennew, 1997). In contrast, Thomas (2007) views the UNCRC's recognition of participation in decision-making as a process as well as an outcome. This differs from other definitions that consider the process of children and young peoples' participation more important than the result (Hart, 1992). The tension between process and outcomes raises several questions relevant to understanding children and young people's participation, especially around the scope, purpose and impact of their engagement on decision-making. Furthermore, a sharp critique of processes without tangible outcomes emerges as participation with no real impact on decision-making frustrates children and young people who join participatory initiatives in order to institute change (Tisdall, 2014).

When the Committee included the idea of mutual respect between children and adults as a key component of the participation definition, it seems to imply the reinforcement of a dialogue between children, young people and adults that may lead to power sharing. Wyness (2013) states that this process is an ethical and political commitment to sharing information amongst children, young people and adults, implying interdependent relationships. Lastly, the joint learning process

included in the General Comment's definition also ensures an exchange of information between the children and young people themselves as well as an open dialogue between them and adults (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). The definition provides optimal options and conditions to listen to children and young people as competent participants in social life; however, research and practice reveal the difficulties in practising these components. Despite the aims laid out in Article 12, children and young people still experience enormous limitations in being heard and lack of adequate spaces that prevent them from exercising their right to participate in decision-making (Thomas, 2007; Wyness, 2009; Burke, 2010; Sharpe, 2015).

Despite these limitations, there is some recognition that the UNCRC's conceptualisation of participatory rights gives children and young people a new status by recognising them as subjects deserving of rights who are entitled to be heard and participate in decision-making processes (Archard, 2005). As a result, Article 12 represents a substantial shift in the nature of relationships between society and children and young people, now recognising them as actors who do not need to prove their competence (Verhellen, 2015). However, Lundy (2007) points out that Article 12 includes a stipulated restriction, which implies that the right to express a view is afforded to a child 'who is capable of forming his or her own views' which can be mature or not.

Despite this international recognition, implementation of participatory rights embraced in the UNCRC has been subjected to sustained criticism due to lack of sustainability, tokenism and exclusion (Tisdall, 2013). Further, critics of the UNCRC

argue that the concept of universal children's rights imposes a model of participation that does not fit well in a world characterised by cultural diversity and different concepts of childhood (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013). Similarly, Mayall (2000) points out that the rights given to children and young people by the UNCRC are conceptualised in a dominant western model, reinforcing the concept of universal childhood. Opponents of the universal conceptualisation of childhood echo a wider debate from the 1980s and 1990s about the need for recognition of children and young people from diverse childhoods around the world as competent social actors (James and Prout, 1997). The rise of the sociology of childhood unlocked new conceptualisations about childhood and provided new perspectives on the critique of the UNCRC's universal childhood model. The next section explores the emergence of this discipline and the concepts that influence the new understandings of childhood in connection with children and young people's right to participation.

### **2.2.1. Understanding childhood as a social construction**

The sociology of childhood, now named childhood studies, emerged in the late 1980s as a disciplinary focus created in reaction to well-established paradigms to inform the child development and family studies disciplines respectively (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). The arrival of the sociological approaches to childhood articulated a new space, allowing debate on two core components: the conceptualisation of childhood as social construction and the agency of children (Prout, 2011). Mayall (2012) argues

that this change in emphasis questioned and confronted the notion of a standard childhood and offered a more complex and diverse view.

The sociology of childhood draws attention to the meaning that childhood is socially and historically constructed (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). Prout (2011) points out that the understanding of childhood as social construction is built on the belief that there are multiple childhoods that coincide, intersect or conflict with each other. This implies that the way in which childhood is understood varies across different countries and cultures and the concepts of childhood are negotiated and shaped by the interactions of the members of any given society in specific times and contexts (James and James, 2012). From this perspective, there is no universal standard childhood but a plurality of childhoods that are constructed by the different realities and interactions that children and young people have with each other and their own environments (Morrow, 2011). Furthermore, Prout (2011) argues that childhoods are diverse and fragmented not just across countries and regions but also within a single country, in which the understanding of childhood is locally constructed throughout the interactions of members of the social group. James and Prout (1997) developed the following key features of the childhood sociological paradigm:

- Childhood is understood as a social construct, distinct from biological immaturity.
- Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender or ethnicity. Cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single and universal phenomenon.
- Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.

- Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.
- Ethnography is a particularly useful method for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of data.
- To proclaim a new paradigm of childhood study is to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society (James and Prout, 1997, p8-9).

Mayall (2000) argues that these tenets, now widely and collectively known as childhood studies, play a pivotal role in shifting the understanding of childhood through promoting analysis of the differences and multiplicity of childhoods that exist in the world. She notes that this counter-universal conceptualisation of childhood contributes to three relevant changes in thinking. First, children and young people are considered competent of contributing as social actors and are not merely objects in need of adult protection. Secondly, children and young people are seen as actors who interact with social structures and have the ability not only to reproduce but also transform such structures. Finally, children and young people's views, desires and needs are deemed a necessary contribution to the generation of social policies, services and practices that have an impact on their lives.

Tisdall and Punch (2012) assert that the foundational components of the sociology of childhood contributed enormously to the paradigm shift away from universal childhood in academic discourse, policy and practice. However, they also argue that these tenets were promoted, disseminated and embraced broadly, especially in the UK, without being problematised and theorised enough until recent



efforts to interrogate them more critically. The conceptualisation of childhood as contested and socially constructed implies that childhood is defined differently from society to society and changes over time based on the diversity of cultural and historical settings (James and Prout 1997). This notion has been widely embraced within childhood studies and integrated in academic work, policy and practice over the last three decades (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). This recognition has had an impact on the way we understand how societies construct different conceptions of childhood and facilitates the understanding of children and young people's contrasting position in any given society (Archard, 2005).

The debate on the universalisation and standardisation of childhood drawn from the UNCRC was reconciled somewhat by recognising childhood diversity across societies and communities. Punch (2009) argues that whilst incorporating the perspective of childhood as a singular social category, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is a diversity of childhoods, which have a number of commonalities and shared experiences but also significant differences. Furthermore, Punch emphasises that one of the major threats is to over-homogenise childhood as this could mask the diversity within and across societies. The new interpretations distance themselves from a mono-identity of childhood. In contrast, they believe that each society determines their own version of childhood and its position within their social structure, inferring that there is no one childhood or one way to experience childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). In the same vein, Wyness (2013) argues that the focus should not be on the divergence of views between Western and non-

Western childhoods, but on the recognition of childhoods' diversity. Tisdall and Punch (2012) note:

Focusing on children and young people's perspectives, agency and participation is no longer sufficient; greater emphasis is needed on the intricacies, complexities, tensions, ambiguities and ambivalences of children and young people's lives across both majority and minority world contexts. (Tisdall and Punch, 2012, p259)

As this quote suggests, the conceptualisations of childhood together with the abstract notions of children's rights require more analysis and debate on the relationships and intergenerational aspects that characterise the diverse cultural contexts at global, national and local levels.

### **2.2.2. Children and young people as social actors**

One of the core tenets of childhood studies is that children and young people are social actors in their own right, meaning that they are individuals with their own identity and active participants in constructing knowledge.

Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes. (James and Prout, 2008, p4)

This recognition of children and young people as active, competent social actors became a core aspect of the paradigm shift. As a result children and young people became seen as capable and competent individuals to make decisions and influence their environments (Mayall, 2013). James and James' (2004) examination of children and young people from a sociological perspective argues that children and young people establish relationships with their environments, peers and adults and interact with others, producing changes in their lives and in the lives of others. Even though the tenets of the sociology of childhood do not mention children and young people's participation as a discrete concept, the notion of children as competent social actors fit neatly within the discourse on children's rights and the participatory rights proclaimed by the UNCRC, recognising children and young people as right-holders (Thomas, 2007). The concept of social actors resonates within the UNCRC framework, with many common understandings and dominant views of children and young people as non-competent being challenged (Moran-Ellis, 2010). James, Jenks and Prout (1998) provide a helpful view of children and young people as social actors:

...the child is conceived of as a person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs, rights or differences – in sum as a social actor... this new phenomenon, the 'being' child, can be understood in its own right. It does not have to be approached from an assumed shortfall of competence, reason or significance. (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p207)

In this quote, these scholars recognise children and young people as individuals who can speak for themselves in their own right; they have competencies to make decisions and express ideas. The notions of social actors, agency, voice and

participation are sometimes ambiguous within the literature. Wyness (2015) states that these terms are not synonyms but are closely connected and interrelated. Mayall (2002) emphasises that actors and agents are similar concepts, but they have a substantive difference in terms of actions. She notes:

A social actor does something, perhaps something arising from a subjective wish. The term agent suggests a further dimension: negotiation with others, with the effect that the interaction makes a difference – to a relationship or to a decision, to the workings of a set of social assumptions or constraints. (Mayall, 2002, p21)

In this quote Mayall reflects on the differences between social actor and agent by outlining the dimensions of interaction and negotiation, where social actors do something but agents engage in actions with others in order to produce an outcome. This is consistent with Percy-Smith (2010) who argues that participation is not only about how views are represented in decision-making but how views are transformed into actions that make change happen.

This new conceptualisation of children and young people was formed as a reaction to the views portraying them as helpless victims. This position is widely endorsed by childhood studies, academia and practice (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). Furthermore, reference to their agency as capacity for negotiation and interaction with others is contextual and varies across time and space; hence, it is restricted based on social relationships and structures, which can make agency incomplete or impossible (Alanen, 2011). Reflecting on the conflicting relationship between agency and the traditional societal positions of children and young people, Mayall writes:

Given this duality in our new-found understandings of childhood, where children emerge both as competent actors and as heavily controlled and subordinated, the rights of children become not only of crucial importance to the quality of childhood, but also problematic. (Mayall, 2002, p248)

As this quote suggests, agency and the notion of social actors intersect with social structures based on protective approaches for children and young people, which is, for example, reflected in the tension between the right to participate and the right to be protected. Furthermore, Percy-Smith (2010) argues that the concepts of social actors and agency need to be explored in relation to structure, where power is negotiated in order to make sense of structural change.

James and James (2012) define social structure as the “social institutions and relational components of the social fabrics around which societies are organised” (p122). Even though this term might be contended, it is a useful definition to explore and discuss how social structure intersects with childhood studies, especially in relation to key institutional and relational elements. Childhood is influenced by the institutions that form the social structure, such as laws and political institutions, and through the ways that social relations are structured, including ethical systems and systems of social stratifications (Frønes, 2005). Thus, childhood occurs in a social dimension that is framed by laws and politics. Childhood is also powerfully influenced by gender, social class and ethnicity, among other categories, which form the way that children and young people are positioned within the society (Corsaro, 2011). Children and young people, as a social group, though are not only influenced by social structures in determining who they are, but social structures are also defined by

children and young people. They potentially influence the way that social relations are organised and transacted in any given society and time (Qvortrup, 1994). Qvortrup points out that children and young people are constrained by existing social structures, as with any other social group. Nonetheless, they are not passive and helpless members of the society; they are themselves co-constructors of childhood and social structures.

This point raises the intersection between structure and agency, which is central to understanding of the childhood studies. This intersection recognises that the production and reproduction of childhood is not a universal process, rather it varies according to the different experiences of childhood and is deeply connected to the culture, policies and politics of each society (James and James, 2012). This in turn implies recognition of the diversity of childhood and the crucial acknowledgment of children and young people as social actors with the ability to interact and influence their own social contexts. However, questions have been raised regarding how social action and agency are defined and the extent to which children and young people have been able to influence social structures and dominant discourse in an way that have changed the conditions of their own lives (Mayall, 2000).

As a discipline, childhood studies recognises the idea of children and young people as social actors with agency as a central component to reconstructing childhood and elevating children and young people from passive subjects to the active creators (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). However, Tisdall and Punch (2012) point out that the notion of competent social actors is fully endorsed in childhood

studies literature, but the concept of agency has been more problematic and requires further scrutiny and critique (e.g. Oswell, 2013; Wyness, 2015; Esser et al., 2016). Thus, they argue that childhood studies should engage more in the discussion on new theories regarding children and young people's agency, relationships and the interconnection of childhoods in a globalising world.

Childhood is not an isolated phenomenon. Hence, children and young people's competence and agency are linked to the diverse social structures and relationships where they live and grow. Children and young people are influenced by multiple structural factors that impact on their lives, worldviews and understanding of childhood. Age, gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and culture, amongst others, shape children and young people's lives in many different ways, making them very different and creating complex images of childhood and impacting their experiences, opportunities and aspirations. This will be discussed further in the next section.

### **2.2.3. Multiple contexts, inequalities and identities of children and young people**

The complexities of children and young people's lives confirm that there is not a universal conceptualisation of childhood. As a result, research must be conducted within the realm of understanding children and young people's multiple identities, diversity of experiences and inequalities. This echoes Tisdall and Punch's (2012) arguments to revisit theories in order to help to scrutinise and problematise the

interconnections and differences between childhoods globally. The simplification and homogenisation of children and young people as a social group undermine the uniqueness of their particular identities as well as the way they construct and reconstruct the meaning and significance of their experiences.

Social identities are complex and multifaceted, but there is often a tendency to homogenise children and young people as one social group or reduce them to a few identity levels (Alanen, 2016). In contrast, a growing body of research recognises that children and young people are a heterogonous group and categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and age has an impact on the lives of children and young people and determine the opportunities that they have to exercise their rights and participate in social life (e.g. Alanen, 2016; Konstantoni and Emejulu, 2017; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2017). These intersectional identity categories are linked to inequality and in many cases are grounded in policies and practices that perpetuate inequalities (Cho et al., 2013).

For the purpose of this literature review, intersectionality is defined as “the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference ... and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis, 2008, p68). The term intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw (1989) to represent how women of colour are positioned based on their race and gender within specific historical contexts. Nguyen and Mitchell (2014) point out that Crenshaw looks at the way that African American women construct their social positioning while analysing the impact of social and economic inequalities associated with their disadvantaged status. This view recognises the differences between people and how multi-layered categories



of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, age and ethnicity interact and have an impact on social and economic outcomes for particular groups of individuals (Evans and Holt, 2011). It breaks the singular and fixed notion of working with categories in isolation (e.g. gender or disability) in order to advance a comprehensive and broader analysis of marginalisation (Konstantoni and Emejulu, 2017). For instance, Alanen (2016) argues that children and young people are immersed in an intersectional social structure, where they are not just children and young people but rather boys and girls who have an ethnicity or a race, different abilities and are related to a specific culture.

This concept of multiple identities challenges the notion of children and young people as a homogenous group and it helps to identify the diversity of experiences they have and promote understanding of how social inequalities affect them (Thorne, 2004). As James and James (2012) argue, childhood is not a universal or standardised experience; on the contrary, childhood is determined by contexts and social relationships, thus creating multiple categories and understandings. For instance, when people refer to children and young people as an identical group and reduce them to a single category, many groups are ignored within the larger concept of childhood, in particular overlooking the most vulnerable and those with less access to power (Alanen, 2016). Alanen further asserts that children and young people as a social group are often analysed based on their differences to adults; however, they are actually more complex than a stand-alone category. Other commenters concur that gender is strongly connected with power relationships and linked to girls' and boys' decisions and influences their actions, motivations and the way they perceive

themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously (e.g. Thorne, 2004; De Graeve, 2015; O'Neill and Hopkins, 2015).

However, using a gender lens as the only analytical frame could make other categories that also affect the power and inequality in social structures indistinguishable (Davis, 2008). The tendency to focus on just one identity and not on the multiple ones that children and young people possess might exacerbate vulnerabilities. For example, girls with disabilities are historically disadvantaged by their class, race, abilities, ethnicity and language, in addition to their gender (Nguyen and Mitchell, 2014). Also, girls may experience discrimination on the grounds of their gender, but, moreover, could be discriminated against based on their ethnicity, race or socio-economic status (Fredman and Goldblatt, 2015). On the other hand, boys might enjoy preferential treatment based on their gender, but could be discriminated on other grounds, such as age, disability or nationality (Evans and Holt, 2011). Being a girl or a boy has an impact on the life of an individual from birth to adulthood based on the different roles and opportunities culturally assigned within the family as well as society-at-large. Within these contexts, the adoption of an intersectional lens allows researchers to analyse the way in which different categories are interrelated and how their boundaries are permeable based on the contexts and inequalities (Cho et al., 2013). Intersectional analysis helps to understand how girls and boys are subject to multiple issues of inequality, stigma and stereotyping, many of which are invisible due to the tendency to focus just on identity and not on multiple variables, such as policies, institutions and practices, that perpetuate inequality (Thorne, 2004).

Along the same lines, inclusion of the most vulnerable children and young people is an unresolved issue in which the limiting and enabling factors are different for boys versus girls, Christians and Muslims, urban dwellers as opposed to those living in rural areas (Evans and Holt, 2011). While conducting a study on children and young people's participation in Lebanon some years ago, I was confronted by a lack of equal opportunity for children and young people to participate, influenced by these aforementioned external factors and limitations (e.g. disability, nationality or refugee status) rather than a lack of interest by children and young people. However the line became blurred as many other factors (e.g. gender, religion or ethnicity) also could have played a critical role in limiting their participation in decision-making processes in both private and public settings.

At this point, I return to the UNCRC, which sets forth a principle of non-discrimination in Article 2 whereby all rights must be respected without discrimination of any kind, including gender-based discrimination. Additionally, Article 29 affirms that children and young people need to be prepared for a responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance and gender equality. Despite this legal entitlement, experiences show that girls and boys continue to be treated differently based on social, cultural and legal norms that define their roles and responsibilities in society (e.g. Ravnbøl, 2009; Konstantoni and Emejulu, 2017). However, critics of the UNCRC argue that the Convention emphasises issues based on gender that affect more boys than girls; for instance, it calls out issues surrounding child soldiers, which has a larger impact on male children, without addressing the problem of early marriage that affects more females (Freeman, 2011).

Over history and across regions, girls and boys have experienced differences and inequalities as a result of their gender, race, culture, age and society's interpretation of their assigned responsibilities, accepted roles, access to and control over resources and decision-making processes (UN Women, 2011). Of specific interest to my own study, gender, race, culture, religion and age intersects with participation and has implications on the equal engagement of girls and boys, resulting in social structures that prevent children and young people from having equal access to participation opportunities in decision-making (Evans and Holt, 2011). For example, Lewis (2011) explores how restricting girls' movement affects their ability to participate in social activities with other peers in North Lebanon. She points out that in almost all cases, girls – but not boys – must seek parental approval to leave the house to participate in community activities. This limitation has major repercussions on their social life, including access to education, recreational activities and free time. In a recent article, Konstantoni and Emejulu (2017) write how the multiple social identities intersect with inequalities when these identities are unrecognised:

Thus, “being a child” and “having a childhood” mean different things to different children by virtue of their race, class, gender and geographical location. Consequently, we argue for the recognition and action on the complexity of childhoods and the intersectional inequalities many children experience. (Konstantoni and Emejulu, 2017, p17).

This quote reflects the need to take into account the multiple categories of differences that have an impact on the lives of children and young people and role of

research in recognising differences that reinforce inequalities. The understanding of how the multiple categories interact reveals the ways that children and young people's participation is mediated by their worldviews and interpretation of reality.

#### **2.2.4. Section conclusion**

In this section, I have discussed three crucial considerations for the study of children and young people's participation: conceptualising participation, social construction of childhood, and multiple identities and inequalities of children and young people that intersect with their participatory rights. The section reviewed the main conceptualisations of children and young people's participation from international policy, especially through the analysis of Article 12 of the UNCRC and UN General Comments No. 12. By exploring the connections of these policy concepts with the approaches articulated by the sociology of childhood, brings two main elements to understand childhood as social construction and children as social actors. I argued that children and young people's participation needs to be explored as a process whereby children and young people locally construct their childhoods, which are diverse and fragmented in nature. This understanding of participation as a process that varies from society to society and over time helps to explore how children and young people make sense of their own identities as active participants in constructing knowledge.

The final part of this section addressed how children and young people as a social group are influenced by the institutions that form the social structure and how

multiple factors impact their lives, worldviews and understanding of childhood, thus their participation. I discussed the interplay of age, gender, race, ethnicity and culture, amongst others, in shaping children and young people's lives in many different ways, making their understandings of childhood different and complex. The next section explores influential typologies of children and young people's participation that have been developed over the last two decades. The discussion offers views on how these typologies are used to understand and frame children and young people's participation in context.

### **2.3. Unpacking children and young people's participation: typologies and practice**

As discussed in the previous section, the UNCRC proclaims that children and young people have the right to express their views freely and participate in decision-making on issues that affect them. Childhood studies promote the notion of children and young people as competent social actors, capable of transforming the social worlds in which they live. As these foundational components are abstract constructions, adequate typologies are helpful to unpack and understand how children and young people's participation is translated from theory to practice. By examining four influential models of participation in childhood studies literature helps to understand the opportunities and spaces for children and young people to participate.

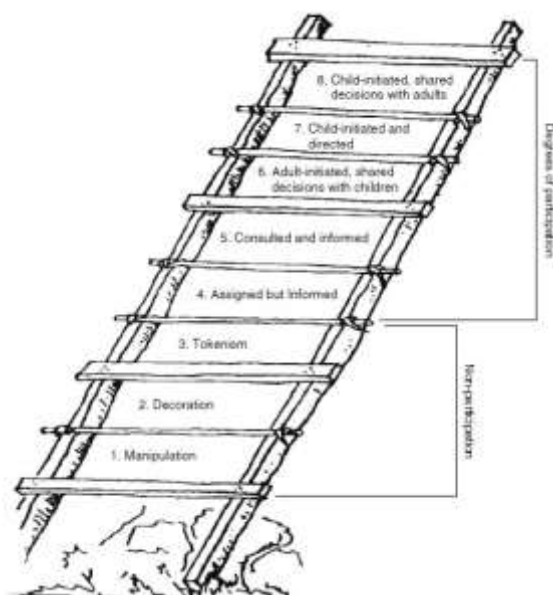
### **2.3.1. Typologies of children and young people's participation**

Thomas (2007) argues that there is no one unified children and young people's participation theory, with the body of knowledge coming from multiple disciplines. He mentions that most of the discussions are centred on the typologies of participation rather than children and young people's participation theories. A number of typologies have been developed over the last two decades in order to clarify the meaning of participation, to interpret how the right to participate is translated into practice and to understand how children and young people effectively engage. Tisdall (2015) credits the respective Hart, Tredeser and Shier models amongst the most cited and influential typologies that promote collective participation. Moreover, Lundy's model has also emerged as a well-known effort to build a typology around the legal interpretation of the UNCRC's Article 12 (see Martin et al., 2015; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015; Horgan et al., 2017).

In the literature focused on children and young people's participation, one of the most prominent models is Hart's ladder, which has been reproduced and adapted many times since its publication in 1992 (Shier, 2001). This model (see Figure 1) has eight rungs that contain several elements, practices and attitudes that define a level of participation. These rungs, from bottom to top, include: manipulation, decoration, tokenism, assigned but informed, consulted and informed, adult-initiated shared decision-making with children, child-initiated and directed actions, and child-initiated shared decision-making with adults (Hart, 1992). Thomas (2007) reminds

researchers that the ladder was not intended to be a model of practice but did become an influential typology on children and young people's participation. Shier (2001) also explains that this model became very popular because it helps practitioners recognise the non-participation levels and make an effort to eliminate those degrees of non-participation from their own programmes. However, Hart's ladder has been criticised on several grounds. For instance, Reddy and Ratna (2002) argue that the model focuses more on the varying levels of adults' roles in relationship to children's participation rather than children's specific roles in the levels of participation. They contend that this model reinforces adults' control over the participation process. From a different angle, Treseder (1997) claims that the major problem is that there is no clear association between the participation process and cultural contexts.

**Figure 1 Hart's ladder of participation**

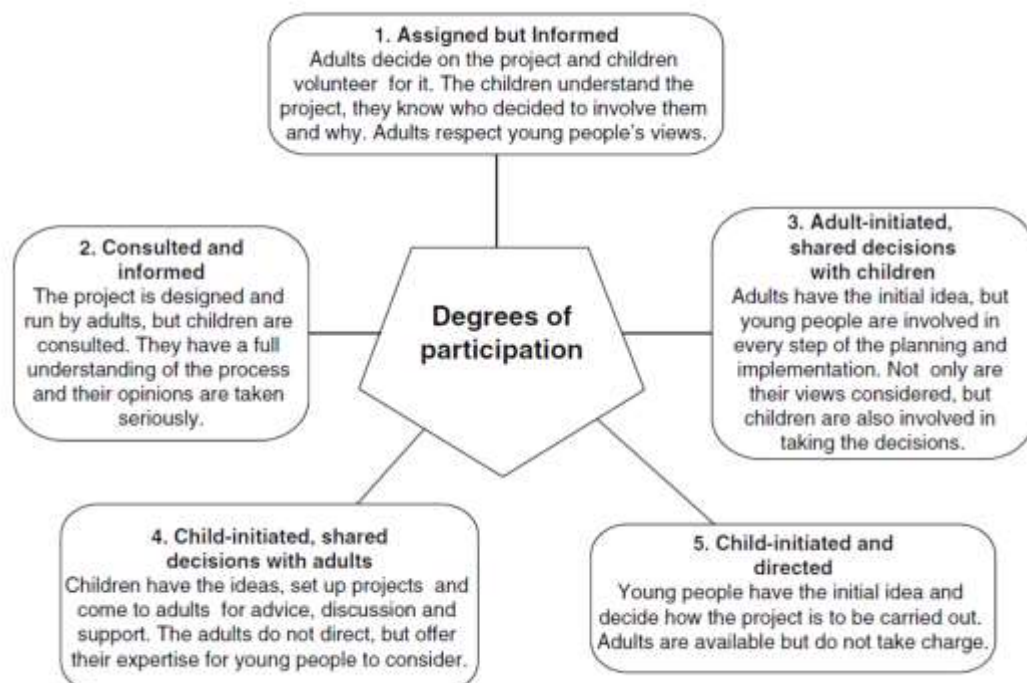


Source: Hart (1992, p8).



After the massive support for and use of his model, and taking into consideration the critiques of his work, Hart (2008) revisited his ladder of participation and emphasised that the ladder is not a fixed structure and the levels can change according to the analysis of multiple circumstances and variables and that its main objective is to bring critical analysis on the topic of children and young people's participation. Based on Hart's ladder, Treseder (1997) designed a typology in a non-hierarchical order (see Figure 2), eliminating the three rungs related to non-participation: manipulation, decoration and tokenism. He keeps the remaining five degrees of participation corresponding to Hart's ladder rungs four through eight, but arranges them in a circular pattern to highlight that participation is not a vertical process and that no one type of participation is superior to another.

**Figure 2 Treseder's model of degrees of participation**



Source: Treseder (1997, p10).

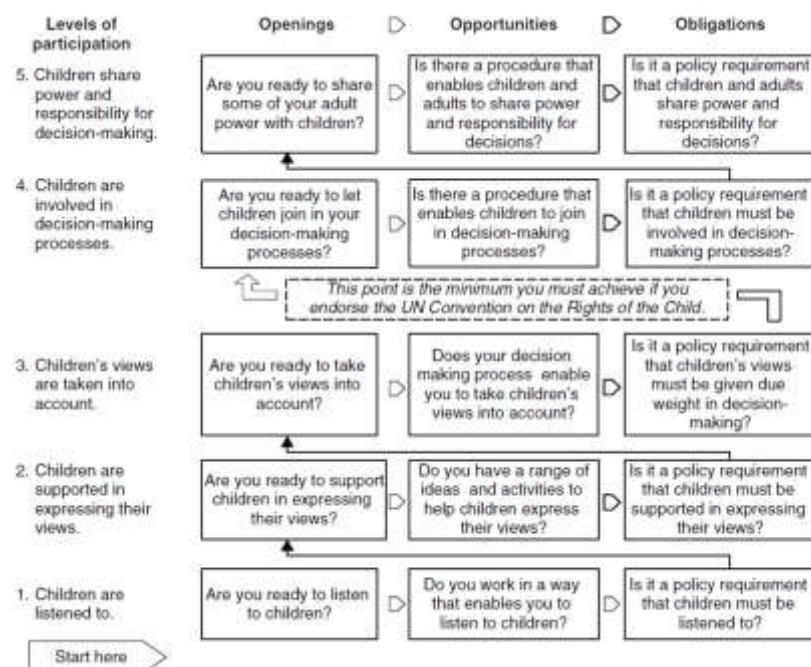
This model contributes to the understanding of children and young people's participation as a dynamic process with factors and components that evolve and change according to different scenarios and conditions (Tisdall, 2014). She points out that one of the contributions of Treseder's model is the inclusion of institutional contexts as key components as children and young people may need support from an organisation in order to move from being consulted and informed to a more meaningful form of participation. However, participation is a dynamic process, she argues, so change over time needs to be assessed; which neither Hart's nor Treseder's models include as a factor that could affect the impact of the models.

Shier (2001) developed a conceptual typology called Pathways to Participation as an alternative model to the ones created by Hart and Treseder. This typology (see Figure 3) aims to resolve tensions around social control as opposed to empowerment and process versus impact and problematising adult domination, dependency and lack of accountability and follow-up (Shier, 2011). It also focuses on the collaborative efforts between children, young people and adults, offering questions for adults to reflect upon when planning or evaluating participatory activities. The model has five levels of participation and three degrees of commitment of adults to engage across the different levels. The five levels of participation are:

1. Children are listened to
2. Children are supported in expressing their views
3. Children's views are taken into account
4. Children are involved in decision-making processes
5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

These five levels are then framed around three levels of commitment of adults to make participation happen: “openings”, “opportunities” and “obligations”. “Openings” occur when the practitioner commits to working in ways that allow for children and young people’s participation. “Opportunity” is when the practitioner is provided with the resources needed to achieve the established goal and “obligation” takes place when there is an agreed upon organisational policy that regulates the way in which practitioners need to operate according to the participation level. Critics of the Shier’s model argue that there is lack of guidance in helping practitioners assess the different levels of participant’s empowerment or how children and young people can be supported in order to achieve the changes they are looking for (Kellett, 2009).

**Figure 3 Shier’s pathway to participation**



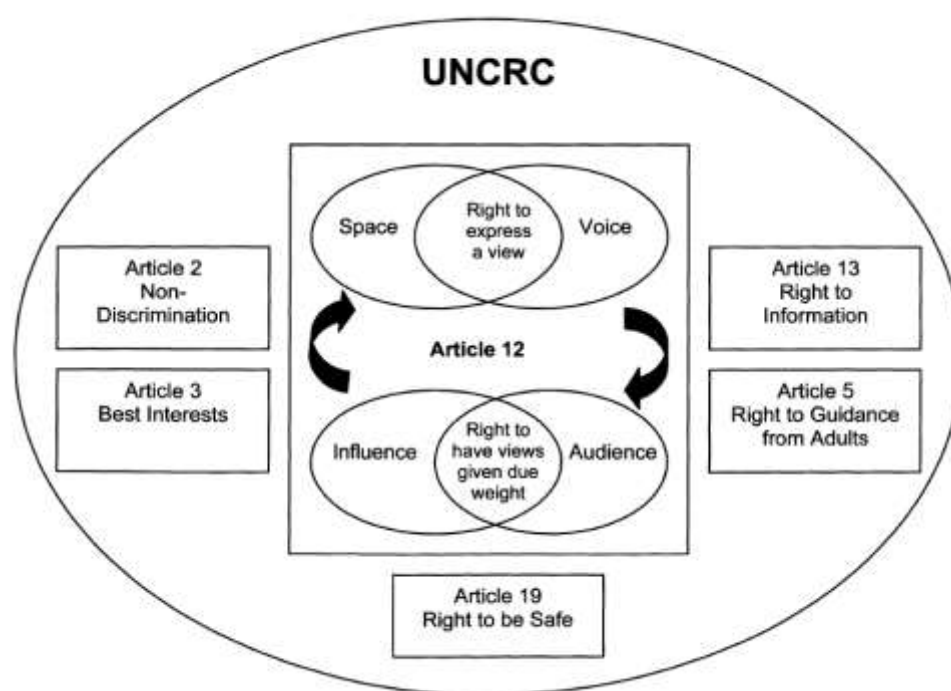
Source: Shier (2001, p111)

Lundy (2007) proposes a model for children and young people's participation that conceptualises the key components of Article 12 and connects them to children and young people's involvement in decision-making processes (see Figure 4). This model uses a policy analysis on the rights of children and young people to participate and includes five UNCRC articles that must be read in conjunction with Article 12 in order to understand the implications of participation rights. These articles are: the principle of non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interest of the child (Article 3), the right to information (Article 13), the right to guidance from adults (Article 5) and the right to protection (Article 19). She focuses on the four interrelated elements of Article 12's provisions and names them "space", "voice", "audience", and "influence". In this model, "space" refers to giving children and young people the opportunity to express a view, "voice" means that they must be facilitated to express their views, "audience" reflects the obligation to listen to the view and "influence" means that these views must be acted upon, as appropriate (Lundy, 2007, p933).

This model aims to understand how the process of children and young people's participation is operationalised in light of the legal standards set forth in the UNCRC. The model helps raise awareness amongst key stakeholders and decision makers on the critical components of participation rights and mechanism needs to ensure that children and young people have the space to not only express their views but also influence decision-making. Lundy (2007) emphasises that there are two interrelated dimensions: adults engaging with children and young people within a participatory process (space and voice) and adults in power taking into account children and young people's views (audience and influence). Using this model helps

practitioners determine how to create spaces for children and young people to engage in decision-making process, review what mechanisms are in place to ensure that their voices are validated, how to ensure strategic audiences are selected and how to guarantee that their views are taken into account by decision makers when appropriate.

**Figure 4 Lundy Model - Conceptualising Article 12**



Source: Lundy (2007, p932)

Research conducted in Ireland using the Lundy model as a framework found that child participants were satisfied with the space they were given to participate and the opportunity to express their views, but they were dissatisfied with their limited influence over decision-making processes (Martin et al., 2015). In a similar vein,

Horgan and colleagues (2017) agree that influence, of the four interrelated Lundy model components, requires further development as children and young people have low expectations of decision-making opportunities as their past experiences show that decisions are generally imposed on them.

The Hart, Treseder and Shier typologies are useful for analysing the different degrees that participation can take in relation to negotiation of power, decision-making and shared responsibilities while Lundy's model is valuable to understanding and exploring whether those who claim to implement rights-based participatory projects, programmes and strategies are completely aligned with their claims. However, these models do not fully capture the complexities of children and young people's lives and do not guide them or adults on how to build participation and dialogue spaces. For instance, one model can be applicable in one context, but, at the same time, could be unacceptable in another because of the culture, values or diversity of participatory practices. Tisdall reflects on this complexity:

Thus, participation models are growing more complex, with wider recognition of institutional, social, political, cultural and economic influences and the mechanisms to increase children and young people's involvement. Such models, however, still largely set up a dichotomy between children and adults and thus ignore the diversity of individuals and relationships. (Tisdall, 2015, p188)

Tisdall signals that the operationalisation of the models provides tools to increase opportunities and spaces to participate. However, they do not offer a lens to analyse the challenges and exclusionary practices that silence children and young people or,

for instance, how different representations of childhood within the same community can have an impact on the options of children and young people to participate, be excluded or be imposed upon.

The complexities of children and young people as a social category requires the inclusion of different lenses to understand how their participation in society is impacted by inequalities of power (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). I argue that these models fall short of acknowledging and addressing the dominant influences that social structures have on children and young people and on their understanding of the options they have to modify those structures. This is consistent with Johnson (2011) who argues that it is critical to consider the contexts where the participation of children and young people takes place. Their abilities to participate are linked to their context, which vary over time, where they are encouraged or discouraged to participate according to the value that a society gives to their participation.

These models do not include detailed elements that shape the way their participation is constructed, for instance gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and religions. These models also are inadequate to respond to the challenges of having children and young people's participation within any degree of adult support. This issue is somehow related to the limiting nature of Article 12 that entitles the right to participate by considering children and young people as capable and autonomous social actors as outlined in the General Comments No.12. Similarly, Verhellen (2015) argues that the autonomy required of children and young people to exercise their rights and make decisions is a challenging concept as many adults are opposed to such perspective based on their belief that children and young people

are incapable of making decisions. In this revision, I have argued that the models have been useful to operationalise the concept of participation and many of them have been transformed into programmes and used to frame and evaluate these practices. Though, it is crucial to rethink these typologies in light of reflections on how children and young people as social actors are part of structures that frequently oppose their active participation and how the different identities that form childhood impact the way that children and young people are perceived as active social participants.

### **2.3.2. Section conclusion**

In this section of the chapter I have discussed four models of children and young people's participation in order to understand how the operationalisation of the concepts and principles of participation has contributed to increased opportunities and spaces to children and young people to participate in society within the theoretical position that they are competent social actors entitled to the right to participate in decision-making. The chapter reviewed the respective Hart, Tredeser, Shier and Lundy models, which are amongst the most influential typologies that unpack the collective participation of children and young people. The section noted that these typologies have been particularly valuable in understanding and translating participation concepts into practice; however each model has significant limitations in large part due not fitting with all types of participation across understandings of childhood not addressing particular issues about social structure and multiple identities of children and young people.



In the next section, I will discuss how children and young people's participation has evolved from theoretical concepts and models to some specific practices that aim to give space to children and young people to engage in research as a means to get involved in decision-making and the generation of knowledge, which is a core component of this research project.

#### **2.4. Children and young people's participation in research: a growing practice**

The understanding of children and young people as competent social actors, childhood as a social construction, and the UNCRC recognition of children and young people as right-holders has resulted in the emergence of children and young people's participation in research as new opportunities for participation (Thomas, 2015). Lundy and McEvoy (2012) point out that the UNCRC has influenced the participation of children and young people in research as part of the implementation of Article 12, moving away of conducting research on them but with them. Thomas (2015) argues that an additional factor facilitating the growth of this practice is the increasingly popular application of participatory research methods that enable researchers to investigate collaboratively with children and young people.

Bradbury-Jones and Taylor (2015) argue that academia and practice have witnessed the increasingly active participation of children and young people in research as participants, co-researchers or lead researchers, with or without the support of adults. Some initiatives have been carried out by academic institutions (Kellett, 2005; Newell et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2014); by NGOs as part of their

international development programmes (Save the Children, 2010; CESESMA, 2012; World Vision, 2013; Challenging Heights, 2015) and by educational institutions (Thomson and Gunter, 2007; Roberts and Nash, 2009; Spalding, 2012; Wood, 2015). Other initiatives were prompted by pressure from the international community or resulted from the UNCRC Committee's concluding observations that encourage Member States and multilaterals to engage children and young people in knowledge production on how they exercise their rights in light of the implementation of the UNCRC (Miller, 2007; European Union, 2015).

#### **2.4.1. Knowledge generation and children and young people**

In discussing the definition of knowledge and how it is created, Berger and Luckmann (1968) argue that knowledge "is the sum total of what everybody knows about a social world, an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths" (p.65). They argue that all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, such that the analysis of knowledge is related to understanding the social construction of reality; consequently, within societies there exist a variety of types of knowledge.

Csiernik and Birnbaum (2017) identify four sources of knowledge: (1) cultural traditions (e.g. Chinese people know the colour of a bride's wedding dress is red), (2) people in authority (e.g. parents pass knowledge on to their children), (3) experience (e.g. by touching the stove, people know that the stove is hot) and (4) scientific research (e.g. knowledge that is the outcome of a scientific process). The first three sources of knowledge are considered naturalistic knowledge and the fourth one,

empirical. Scientific knowledge is arrived at through a research process, looking at evidence to explore and understand reality; moreover, it is public and open to critical review.

In this context, research is one of the main contributors to scientific knowledge generation, which is achieved through a process aimed at acquiring specific types of information using queries, which, in conjunction with the research purpose, identify and produce a particular form of knowledge that researchers aim to uncover (Blaikie, 2009). This is generally done using three types of questions: 'what?', 'why?' and 'how?' These questions, in conjunction with the research purposes, are the key elements to identify and produce any particular type of knowledge that a researcher strives to uncover (Gray, 2009). Mackenzie and colleagues (2012) point out that by using research questions, researchers aim to provide empirical knowledge of the nature of a problem and its causes by gathering empirical data, which is analysed to make generalisations (Ansell et al., 2012). For Hjorth (2003), the distinct process of building knowledge through research is that the data and information collected are analysed within specific contexts, which affect the meanings and value of the knowledge produced. This means that the generated knowledge is filtered, reproduced and disseminated based on the data, which is analysed taking into account the contexts and the individual perspectives of the researchers. Likewise, Pratt (2000) points out that knowledge is shaped by the social context in which it is generated, and this impacts the way in which this knowledge is presented and used. Ansell and colleagues (2012) argue that social contexts play a pivotal role in generating knowledge, whereby there is not a neutral means of

producing knowledge. According to Hordijk and Baud (2006) this understanding of knowledge production within specific social contexts differs from positivist scientific paradigms, which considered scientific knowledge to be objective and value-free.

In discussing what can be judged as legitimate research that generates accepted knowledge, Lincoln and Guba (2000) point out that qualitative research requires alternative criteria for scrutinising research, as opposed to quantitative-oriented criteria. They developed the following four-factor set of criteria: (1) credibility, which implies that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participants in the research, (2) transferability, which means that the findings can be applied in other contexts, (3) dependability, which refers to findings that are consistent and can be repeated and (4) confirmability, or the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others. For Shenton (2004), the combination of these four elements helps qualitative researchers to ensure that the knowledge generated in their research is academically sound.

Through research methodologies researchers collect data and learn from their informants, and define the concepts provided by the informants by using theories or frameworks (Cornwall and Fujita, 2012). Breitbart (2003) argues that this is but one way to generate knowledge, and relies mainly on the work of researchers; however, there are many other ways to produce knowledge, for instance the knowledge generated by ordinary people that are able to create knowledge based on their own experiences and the access they have to simple methodologies to capture and analyse data. Similarly, Cahill (2007) points out that the generation of

knowledge does not belong exclusively to research institutions as all individuals who are able to formulate their own particular views on the issues they experience in their lives can also produce knowledge. However, Ansell and colleagues (2012) argue that, whilst non-researchers who engage in knowledge generation are indeed able to produce new knowledge, it is nevertheless important to be sure that this knowledge is not solely based on their personal experience.

Scholars associated with the participatory action research paradigm believe that knowledge can be produced collectively by those who engage in research through an inclusive approach that has the potential to bring forth largely underrepresented perspectives and to bring new audiences to the debate (Hordijk and Baud, 2006; Cahill, 2007; Dold and Chapman, 2012). This type of participatory knowledge generation is held to be less theory based and more embedded in the characteristics of the actors who engage in defining the research questions and analysing the data collected (Cornwall and Fujita, 2012). Oliver (1997) argues that the exclusive creation of knowledge by research using scientific methods can be contested, as this is not the only way to produce knowledge. Furthermore, he advocates for adjustments in research production in order to involve non-academic actors in the knowledge generation. This position is supported by scholars who indicate that people beyond academia and research institutions are also entitled to contribute to knowledge creation; however, these groups have been historically excluded from knowledge production processes (Cahill, 2007).

The exclusion of certain forms of knowledge, for instance, those from children and young people, reinforces social inequalities and power imbalances where

powerful actors hold the control of knowledge and impose their interests and views over the less powerful ones, resulting in their exclusion from knowledge production (Hordijk and Baud, 2006; Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008). In order to address this disparity in knowledge creation, scholars and researchers engage in participatory research processes to facilitate the involvement of traditionally excluded populations in the construction of their own accounts as a means of producing knowledge (White et al., 2004).

Regarding the engagement of children and young people in knowledge generation, Ansell and colleagues (2012) point out that based on the premise that children and young people are experts on their lives, they are capable of contributing to knowledge generation by participating in research. However, this raises a critical question to determine how the expertise and experiences that children and young people have on their own lives is considered and how it is connected to knowledge generation. James (2007) writes:

Its core is a conception of children as articulate social actors who have much to say about the world, as people who can be encouraged to speak out through the adoption of ethnographic and participatory methods of research. (James, 2007, p261)

As James reflects, childhood studies perceives children and young people as active social actors who can derive meaning from their daily experiences. Using sensitive methodologies that allow their active involvement in research can capture this. James (2007) also argued that children and young people “can carry out their own research projects into areas that are pertinent to their everyday lives” (p262). This stance changes the traditional assumptions that view children and young people as

incompetent or passive objects of research (Alderson, 2001). Being social actors, children and young people bring their views, knowledge and experiences to the research and do not need intermediaries to interpret their lives. However, Davis (2009) warns about the ethical involvement of children and young people in research in order to ensure they engage in issues that they are interested to explore not only on those that directly affect them.

However, engaging children and young people in research can be problematic. As James (2007) points out, their inclusion brings multiple theoretical, methodological and epistemological challenges. In addressing these encounters, Punch (2002) argues that perceiving children and young people as competent social actors implies a need to scrutinise the way research is conducted and adapt methods and techniques that respect the diversity of childhoods and varied social competencies. This position also raises some questions that need to be addressed. For instance, how research that is carried out by children and young people is inclusive enough to represent the accurate views of large group of children (James, 2007). How the power dynamics between children and young people themselves and with adults' impact on the research process (Lundy, 2011). How the capacity or maturity of children and young people to express their views are taken into account (Christensen and Prout, 2002). In response to these challenges, Thomas (2015) suggests that it is critical to develop relevant methodologies and invest the necessary time and resources to ensure effective participation of children and young people in research. Building on the same point, Shier (2015) argues that it is essential to explore the issues of power from an intergenerational perspective and train the adult

facilitators to provide them with the skills and tools needed to support the young researchers.

#### **2.4.2. UNCRC and the engagement of children and young people in research**

In turning the discussion towards how the rights framework outlined in the UNCRC has been influenced children and young people's participation in research, Lundy (2007) argues that the UNCRC has made an impact on enhancing the engagement of children and young people as active participants in research as a way to exercise their participatory rights. In a similar line of thought, Wyness (2013) points out that the Article 12 of the UNCRC and related provisions recognise children and young people as competent actors and introduce a participation-based rights discourse that has been largely influential.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009), in General Comment No. 12, indicates that environments should be provided to enable children and young people to exercise their right to participate and their views should be considered in decision-making and policymaking. Moreover, it states that children and young people are not required to have a comprehensive knowledge of all matters affecting their lives, but rather a sufficient understanding that enables them to form their own views in an appropriate way on the matter at hand (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

Lundy and McEvoy (2012) argue that the growing recognition of the UNCRC's influence on children and young people's engagement in research has also influenced



the debate around child rights-based approaches as a frame to promote this work. This methodology is rooted in the human rights-based approach, which is defined as a “conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights” (OHCHR, 2006, p15). In shifting the focus to children’s rights, Lundy and McEvoy (2012) call attention to the idea that a child rights-based method should be understood as a structure informed by UNCRC standards that will ensure that children and young people, as rights holders, are able to claim their rights and hold duty-bearers accountable for fulfilling their obligations.

In recent years, human and child rights-based approaches have begun to be incorporated into the UN system. In 1998, as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, many UN agencies agreed to develop policy agendas to adopt human rights-based approaches within the scope of their work (Frankovits, 2006). UNICEF was one of the first agencies that developed a human rights-based approach to inform their programmes related to women and children and adopted the UNCRC as its policy frame of reference. During this process, UNICEF embraced a child rights-based approach built on children’s rights standards that promote, protect and fulfil children’s human rights (UNICEF, 2009). One of the immediate consequences of this approach was the agency’s understanding of children and young people as complete human beings, worthy of respect and capable of expressing opinions (UNICEF, 2014).

Governments have also adopted child rights-based approaches multilaterally, one example being the European Union’s child rights mainstreaming approach

(European Union, 2015). Additionally, major global NGOs have played an important role in establishing child-rights frameworks in their programmes in order to provide capacity building, support and awareness-raising for rights-holders and duty bearers (UNICEF, 2009). Two of the largest child-focused NGOs in the world, Save the Children and World Vision, have adopted child-based approaches in their policies, strategies and programmes. World Vision, in particular, ‘promotes a child rights-based approach that recognises children and young people as stakeholders in society, as one group amongst others in decision-making’ (World Vision, 2015, p24). Furthermore, World Vision’s endorsement of the UNCRC implies that its policies and programmes are developed in accordance with the principles outlined in the Convention: participation, non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, and the right to life, survival and development. Similarly, Save the Children states that their work in international development is framed by child rights-based approaches that aim “to hold powerful people and institutions accountable for their responsibilities to those with less power” (Save the Children, 2005b, p21). In this context, Save the Children uses child rights-based programming “to plan, implement and monitor programmes with the overall goal of improving the position of children so that all boys and girls can fully enjoy their rights and can live in societies that acknowledge and respect children’s rights” (ibid, p25).

Applying child rights-based approaches have implications on the way children and young people engage in research. For instance, UNCRC standards should inform their participation and build the capacities of rights-holders to claim their rights and duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012). Whilst many

organisations claim that these three components are included in their approaches, this begs the question of how the strategies, policies and programmes implemented in working with children and young people is fully rights-based. Spalding (2012) argues that the emphasis on participatory rights enshrined in the UNCRC and rights-based approaches have changed the focus of research from children as the subject to children and young people as the lead researchers. Nevertheless, Thomas (2015) points out that critics are apprehensive that children and young people are unable to reach the depth of analysis required by research, however, Woodhouse (2003) states that this potential limitation should not restrict their participation in research. Concerns about depth and quality are mostly linked to the restriction of information given to children and young people rather than their inability to contribute meaningfully to an in-depth analysis and discussion of issues.

Shier (2015) argues that children and young people, as experts on their own lives, are qualified to engage in data analysis related to research on their lives and able to provide quality insights and depth to the issues they study. Ansell and colleagues (2012) also believe that children and young people are able to deliver good quality research results and generate collective knowledge that reveals the meanings and experiences explored in their studies. However, they argue that these young researchers should also be facilitated to be critically reflexive while dealing with and presenting evidence. Likewise, Michail and Kellett (2015) state that children and young people are capable of and persistent in covering a wide scope in their child-led research with their contributions of an insider perspective and knowledge creation. Still, they stipulate that this opportunity must be mutually beneficial and

provide both learning and capacity building for the young researchers. Recognising children and young people as “competent interpreters of their everyday worlds” (Mason and Dandy, 2011, p186), opens up new perspectives on understanding the ability of young researchers to reach depth and quality in their child-led research. However, it also raises the issue of how deep children and young people want to delve into their research and how interested they are in ensuring quality and rigour.

### **2.4.3. The influence of the participatory research approaches**

Another domain of influence in the engagement of children and young people in research is the discourse and methodologies of participatory research, such as emancipatory, social action and feminist research (Kellett, 2005). Oliver (1997) argues that emancipatory research, from the perspective of the disability movement, illustrates several ways in which traditional paradigms can be changed, for instance by challenging conventional research practices, developing new methodologies that enable people to engage in research and describing good practices that exemplify these types of research. Emancipatory research was originally developed in order to include people living with disabilities in research, and it seeks to change research paradigms using three factors, which are reciprocity, gain and empowerment (Oliver, 1997). For Oliver, the process of creating knowledge should embed these three components into social research; however, this merger requires changes to the traditional research principles, especially in the way that the research subjects are involved throughout the process. Emancipatory research illustrates several ways in which the paradigms can be changed, for instance challenging the ideology of

traditional research practices, developing new methodologies suitable to emancipatory research, and describing good practices on this type of research (Mackenzie et al., 2012).

In the United Kingdom, participatory research has become popular to the extent that the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) has commissioned projects to undertake methodological research to strengthen and promote participatory approaches to research (Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC), 2015). As indicated by the NCRM, research led by children and young people is considered to be at the cutting edge of research methods and more investment is needed in order to expand this work. This is explained by the NCRM call for methodological research projects in 2015:

Participatory research is characterised by the involvement of research participants across various (and potentially all) stages of the research process, and is seen as particularly important for research involving 'hard to reach' populations, marginalised groups, and those with communication difficulties. This area supports the ESRC's desire to encourage more co-designed and co-produced research. There is also huge potential in this area, particularly on the use of new technology to encourage innovation. (ESRC, 2015, p3)

There is clearly an emerging interest by the NCRM in opening up opportunities for participatory research and documenting good practices in which people beyond academia, especially those who are from marginalised segments of society, engage in participatory research. Regarding co-production, which can be described as "the emphasis is on changing relationships between the state and citizens: public services should be co-produced by service users and communities' (Tisdall, 2017, p67), the

NCRM encourages research to understand what methodologies are needed in order to ensure that researchers and community partners can engage in collaborative work to generate new knowledge.

Feminist research have also contributed to the discourse surrounding children and young people as researchers, challenging the legitimacy of traditional research that do not deal with issues of power and emancipation and reinforce the exclusion of disempowered and invisible groups of people (Bloor and Wood, 2006). Along the same line of thought, black feminist research developed theories and research methodologies to study African American women who were historically oppressed by theories based on middle-class and white male paradigms (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). This new theoretical framework leads to recognising vulnerabilities and equalities, and places women of colour at the centre of the research process. For Kellett (2005), gender components in feminist research are comparable to childhood components; for instance, disenfranchisement, which refers to the deprivation of some rights, such as the right to vote. Kellett argues that as in the case of women in feminist research, children and young people can also shape research in different ways if they are placed at the centre of the process. This means that children and young people can outline the research purpose, methodology and analysis, and contribute with their unique points of view, which might differ from adult perspectives. As with feminist research, when children and young people carry out their own research they create knowledge but this knowledge is not just new information; it is also about power and how this power dynamic as a focus can be used to change things they believe are unfair. For instance, a frequent motivation of

young researchers to engage in research is to use their findings to influence those with power with the aim to make a change (Ansell et al., 2012; Porter et al., 2012; Shier, 2017).

From an international development perspective, child-focused organisations, such as Save the Children, Action for Children and the Centre for Education in Health and Environment (CESESMA), have been using methods and approaches to enhance participatory action research with children and young people (see Save the Children, 2005; CESESMA, 2012; Shier, 2015; Wood, 2015; World Vision, 2017a). The focus of these processes has been influenced by the participation rights outlined in the UNCRC as these organisations have made strategic commitments to engage children and young people in their research programmes in order to achieve tangible outcomes as a result of children and young people's participation.

For example, Save the Children (2010) supported child-led research in Nigeria, Uganda, Angola and Zimbabwe where 12 children and young people conducted their own study to explore the life of child carers, aged 8 to 17, who were looking after sick and disabled adults and young siblings. They interviewed 124 child carers, analysed the data collected and wrote case studies to illustrate how children perform the carers' role and the level of that role. Based on this experience, Save the Children concluded that the child-led research conducted in these four sites in Africa was a "successful practice which resulted in the collection of rich and detailed information with insights that could not have been gathered by adult researchers" (2010, p.1). This claim can however be challenged by questioning why an adult researcher cannot get that data from child carers if they use an appropriate methodology to interview

them. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to what exactly is the unique information that the young researchers can discover which differs to that of an adult researcher? Another factor that could be argued is that the young researchers collected analysed the data, but they did not decide the topic and scope of the research, and they did not write the report.

In the United Kingdom, Action for Children supported seven children and young people to conduct child-led research to explore and gather the views of children on the Common Assessment Framework, which is one of the elements of UK integrated frontline service delivery of the Children Act 2004 (Participation Works, 2009). The young researchers engaged a further 104 children and young people to include their perceptions on the framework through interviews and conversations carried out over four workshops. The young researchers led the research and mentored the participants to understand the process and helped them to contribute with their insights. The major claim of this research project is high-level of self-esteem, confidence and belonging to a group reported by the research participants. However, it is not clear if the findings influenced changes in the Common Assessment Framework, as one of the main recommendations was to make the Framework more child-friendly.

In Nicaragua, CESESMA, a local NGO that supports rural children in promoting and defending their human rights, supported children and young people from coffee-growing areas to conduct their own research in order to generate knowledge and to make a change and address deep-rooted social problems (Shier, 2015). The research team was comprised of 12 children and young people, aged 10 to 16, who were from



a coffee plantation in rural Nicaragua. They interviewed 59 children and young people to explore the issue of violence that they face on the plantation. The young researchers collected and analysed the data and wrote up a report with the main findings and recommendations for change. An adult facilitator who supported and guided their work assisted them, but the young researchers had the control of the research design and implementation, and produced their own report written in their own style without adult editing. Shier (2015) argues that the main constraint to validate the child-led research is funding, which implies that young researchers are not always free to choose their research topics as these are often determined by available funding. Another challenge is to organise and fund the advocacy actions outlined by the young researchers once the research report is public. Nevertheless, these challenges are also present in most of the academic research, in which researchers commonly face limitations regarding funding, knowledge exchange and impact. These issues are critical in discussing the engagement of children and young people in research and recognises the value of analysing if the young researchers are able to untangle the difficult encounters of conducting research.

Whilst these examples show that there is an increasing number of research projects in which children and young people, it is mainly children and young people aged 8 to 18 who are actively engaged in different phases of the research process, there are still some major constraints regarding research that is entirely led by children and young people. This will be discussed further in the next section.

#### **2.4.4. From participating in research to leading it: child-led research**

Over the past decade, academia and practice witnessed an increasing engagement of children and young people as leading researchers on issues that pertain to their everyday lives (Thomas, 2015). Child-led research, as a participatory approach, emerged as a promising practice to provide children with new opportunities to influence decision-making by using their own findings to put pressure on stakeholders and decision makers (Newell et al., 2012). A growing body of evidence confirms that child-led research provides promising opportunities to engage children and young people in shaping policy and practice, ultimately creating change that led to better lives for them (Skelton, 2008). However, the tension between the knowledge produced by children and young people and knowledge produced by academics have limited the opportunities for children and young people to lead their own research (Cahill, 2007; Campbell and Trotter, 2007).

Fleming (2011) argues that a major review of research principles and methodologies is needed in order to ensure the engagement of children and young people in research, including a comprehensive review of epistemological positions with regard to who can generate knowledge. From a theoretical perspective, children and young people as active players in generating knowledge is consistent with childhood studies which view children and young people as articulate social actors with the competencies and abilities to participate in and lead research (James and James, 2004). For Morrow (2008), when children and young people are seen as competent social actors, they are also seen as competent research participants as

they are recognised as individuals with unique abilities to communicate and actively participate in social research. Whilst exploring the role of children and young people in research, Kellett defines child-led research as:

Research that children design, carry out and disseminate themselves with adult support rather than adult management. (Kellett, 2010, p195)

From Kellett's definition, one can deduce that child-led research has two central components: the role of children and young people throughout the different phases of the research process and the role of adults who support them. According to this definition, children and young people have a leading role in the research project's design, including tasks such as developing the research questions, selecting the methods, collecting the data and analysing the results. Once the research is finalised by the children and young people, they should also actively engage in the dissemination of the findings, including acting to make an impact on policy and practice (Kellett, 2010). The supporting role of adults is a critical component of the child-led research definition, marking a major difference with academic or professional research, which normally does not require other people's facilitation role as researcher conduct independent research by their own.

For Kellett (2011), adults play a central part in providing children and young people with the opportunities and skills to conduct research, implying a role of support and empowerment, rather than one that controls or manages children and young people in the research process. In the same vein, Shier (2015) argues that the term child-led research is intrinsically connected to the different levels of leadership and control that children and young people wield over their research project. In this

process, an adult facilitator, whose role can vary from being supportive to highly controlling, supports children and young people. A less directive approach ensures the ownership of the research process by the children and young people. Shier points out that these relationships need to be problematised in order to determine the level of control that young researchers have over their child-led research. This implies that it is critical to explore the adult control over research in order to understand if those children and young people who engage in a research project could be considered lead researcher or research participants.

In terms of benefits and constraints, Davis (2009) suggests that children and young people benefit by learning from the experience of undertaking child-led research, in addition to their contribution of a better understanding of the research issues. Children and young people as direct researchers also contribute by bringing their own perspectives, asking unique questions, exploring issues in different ways than many adult researchers and providing innovative opportunities to obtain data from an insider perspective due to easier accessibility to peers (Shier, 2015). Tisdall (2009) agrees that children and young people are able to participate in different stages of research from data collection to result analysis to produce an impact on policy. In the same vein, Davis (2009) argues that researchers are called upon to involve children and young people, as a moral imperative and that engagement should go beyond a respondent role. However, good practice in child-led research is not widely present in literature, and Fleming (2001) argues that many examples of this type of engagement have never been documented because not always children

and young people have requested support from adults or academic institutions with their research.

For Morrow (2008), the participation of children and young people in research raises specific ethical and methodological questions related to data collection, analysis and dissemination. She argues that one of the main issues with engaging children and young people in research is the compliance with strict ethical guidelines surrounding privacy, confidentiality, consent, participant selection, methods and information about the research. Although Morrow acknowledges that the ethical principles in research are similar between child and adult participants, she points out that there are significant differences due to the specific social and cultural characteristics of children and young people. An example of that are the child protection measures, parent's consent and situations in which confidentiality of children and young people can be breached.

Thomas (2015) argues that when children and young people participate and lead research, this helps to bring children and young people's views to the public awareness and debate and can contribute to addressing the issues that they want to raise. This echoes Lundy's model that signals the engagement of children and young people in research is a matter of principle and aims to respect their position of children and young people as rights-holders who have the competence to conduct research and to influence an audience to contribute to decision-making processes affecting them (Lundy et al., 2011).

According to Tisdall (2009), one of the reasons why children and young people engage in research, as with adult researchers, is because they want to have a level of influence to shape practice and policy. Despite limited evidence from child-led research literature, some studies have documented children and young people's experiences using their research findings to influence decision-making. On the other hand, children and young people's participation in research raises ethical and methodological questions related to power inequality, tokenism, manipulation and adult-focused agendas (Kellett, 2005).

Participation in leading research can be also affected by inequalities amongst children and young people, which reflect their diverse social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, in addition to personal characteristics such as popularity and age (Spyrou, 2011). Furthermore, many questions arise about the meaningful opportunities for children and young people to participate in child-led research projects. The main concerns are related to how these projects can ensure that children and young people are free to set their own research priorities, and define the scope of the research and the particular type of dialogue they want to have with decision makers using their findings. These stages can be affected by the paternalistic ways in which children and young people are perceived by adults, and the tensions between the different agendas and interests that adults, children and young people could have (Clark and Percy-Smith, 2006).

#### **2.4.5. Section conclusion**

In this section of the chapter, I have discussed two essential considerations whilst studying the engagement of children and young people in research: involvement as participants in research and leading the research process. The discussion has noted that increasingly children and young people have engaged actively in research as participants, co-researchers or lead researchers. I highlighted the major influences in this phenomenon, such the recognising children and young people as competent social actors who have the abilities to engage in research and contribute to knowledge generation. This also included the role of the UNCRC and consequently the children's rights agenda to enhance the engagement of children and young people as active participants in research as part of their participatory rights. Furthermore, the chapter reviewed the disciplines that have contributed to engagement in research such as the emancipatory research and feminist research. The section then discussed the concerns that child-led research poses regarding quality, adult support and knowledge creation.

#### **2.5. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has examined the concept of children and young people's participation from both an international policy and theoretical perspective. My analysis focused on the review of Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) and General Comments No. 12 (2009) in order to scrutinise the components that form a definition for children and young

people's participation. While participation has multiple definitions, this chapter discussed the UNCRC terminology as this treaty has had a significant influence in practice and policy in general and in international development contexts in particular. This understanding of participation contrasts with the notion of participation as merely taking part in or being present at activities and offers perspectives in which children and young people are entitled to participate in decision-making processes on issues that have an impact on their lives. I then discussed how these global policy concepts are influenced by the arrival of the sociological approaches to childhood that bring the social construction and children as social actors as central principles from this theory. The universal standards of the UNCRC move away from the theoretical conceptualisation of children and young people as a social construction, which implies that this social category is defined differently from society to society and it is locally constructed throughout the interactions of all members of the social group.

The chapter then discussed theorisations of children and young people as social actors with their own identities who are active participants in social life interacting with other in interdependent relationships. The literature shows that the institutions and relations that form the social structure influence these interactions. Children and young people are influenced by multiple categories such age, gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and culture that define they ways they make sense of their lives and opportunities they to participate. The chapter then turned to explore the operationalisation of the concept of participation by reviewing four typologies that aimed to translate theoretical positions into practice.



The chapter closed with a discussion of the engagement of children and young people in research as an opportunity to participate and influence decision-making. Through the last sections of the chapter I discussed how children and young people have increasingly engaged in research as participants and lead researchers. The opportunities to engage in research have been endorsed by the beliefs that children and young people are social actors who are competent to generate knowledge. Furthermore, this is connected to the children's rights agenda that has promoted their engagement in research as a way to exercise their participatory rights. I argued that the creation of knowledge by children and young people as researchers is contested but agree with a number of scholars that there is not just one way to produce knowledge, thus children and young people as researchers can generate knowledge by having appropriate support and using methodologies tailored to their needs and abilities.

# CHAPTER

# THREE

## 3. Methodology

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### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the aim of this project, introduces the research questions and outlines the methods adopted for this study in order to answer those questions. I then discuss the ontological and epistemological perspectives underpinning this research project and describe how my personal experiences and perspectives influenced the methodology and approaches adopted. Furthermore, I reflect on my role as a researcher and how this had an impact on the decision to conduct the research at the selected field sites and the methodological approaches chosen.

I then introduce the study's methods, discuss the decision to use a case study approach and review the theoretical contexts that informed this study. After examining the characteristics of the selected case studies and the research participants, I make an argument for the data collection methods selected for this qualitative research and discuss in detail the fieldwork and the challenges

encountered, including the preparation for the fieldwork, the sessions with research participant, and considerations made for languages and translations. This chapter then examines the data analysis process and the choices made. Lastly, the chapter concludes by analysing the key ethical considerations that were relevant to the project as it involved children and young people as well adults. This section mainly reflects on informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, child protection and cultural sensitivity.

### **3.2 Aim and research questions**

The aim of this research was to critically explore how the process and outcomes of children and young people's participation in their own child-led research contributes, positively or negatively, to decision-making processes in the context of international development programmes. The research questions were:

**Question 1:** What are children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research as a way to influence decision-making?

**Question 2:** What are the processes of child-led research that positively or negatively influence decision-making?

**Question 3:** In what ways does child-led research influence decision-making? (And why and how do they do so?)

During the reflexive process of research design, the study's purpose and research questions evolved from a preliminary proposal that sought to explore broader avenues in which children and young people could participate in the policy arena to

a narrower perspective on how child-led research can be used as a means to participate in public decision-making. This change resulted from a wider reading and deeper analysis of current literature, including reports on innovative examples of research conducted by children and young people. In shaping and refining these research questions, this study became more specific and the questions more feasible and answerable (Yin, 2014). I also reflected on the dilemma of conducting the research project myself or engaging children and young people in a highly participatory process in which they can make critical decisions in the project. I decided to go for the first option as I felt I was not an experienced researcher in participatory methodologies and, secondly, the potential young co-researchers were not motivated in engaging in this study as they just finished their own research project. I, however, used some basic principles of participatory research such as treating the research participants as knowledgeable and critical contributors, giving space for influencing the research process and reflecting jointly on processes and outcomes.

### **3.3 Worldview and epistemology**

In the previous section, I outlined the overarching aim of this research project, which explored how the processes and outcomes of children and young people's participation in child-led research contribute, positively or negatively, to decision-making processes in the context of international development programmes. This study is based on the view that there are multiple versions of reality, which are

shaped by contexts and the way people perceive things (Blaikie, 2009). Therefore the best way to understand individuals' realities is by interacting with them in order to explore what this means to them within the contexts in which they live (Elder-Vass, 2012). In this project, I adopted this position, recognising the existence of a diversity of reality and knowledge (Atkinson et al., 2003).

In line with this position, this research project was influenced by the stance of social constructionism, a "perspective, which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences" (Gergen, 1985, p265). Social constructionists believe that there is no objective truth to be discovered, as they argue that the meaning is no discovered, rather it is constructed through engagement with our realities (Crotty, 1998). This perspective emphasises that human beings are active players in making sense of their lives through social interactions, which are interwoven into the contexts and times in which they are constructed (Gergen, 1999). Thus, there is the belief that the way we understand the world is a result of the historical processing of interactions and negotiations between groups, which are defined by the complexity and interrelatedness of individuals' within cultures and societies (Galbin, 2014). This understanding resonates with the sociology of childhood field, also called childhood studies.

As mentioned in the Chapter Two, much of the discussion of sociology of childhood is around the perspective that reality and childhood are socially constructed; hence, the notion of childhood is negotiated through the everyday interactions of people in society (James and James, 2012). This entails and supports the premise that childhood is a social construction made up of cultural societal

elements and that this construction is distinct from one society to another based on their particular interactions and relationships (Wyness, 2006). The consensus in the field is that children and young people are a heterogeneous group with different experiences according to their specific contexts; therefore, there is no homogenous or general understanding of childhood across cultures and societies, although noting that children is different than childhood (e.g. James and Prout, 1997; James and James, 2004; Corsaro, 2011). Throughout this research project I took this same position, backing the perspective that there are many versions of childhood that are constructed and shaped by multiple cultural, social and political structures. This stance is consistent with the sociological conceptualisation of childhood that views children and young people as a social group found in societal representations and discourses. This conception has an impact on the way that children and young people's lives are interpreted according to social and historical contexts (James and James, 2012). As discussed in Chapter Two, literature review, this position opposes the globalised understanding of childhood based on the UNCRC's implementation do across countries, which can easily be accused of false universalism, with utterly different views about what it means to be a child or a young person in a particular place and time (Tisdall, 2015). This perspective implies that these meanings are influenced by the contexts in which they are constructed, and the interactions and relationships are understood in different ways by those involved (Elder-Vass, 2012).

Consequently, I took the stance that children and young people, whose experiences with conducting child-led research I explored have specific social positions within their place in society. That, and the way they manage power

relationships and interactions with others, made it possible to explore their lives from their particular perspectives (Mayall, 2002). This position argues that children and young people are not passive members of society, but, on the contrary, are competent social actors in the construction of their own lives (James and Prout, 1997), have the ability to participate in decision-making processes and are able to develop their own perspectives and opinions within specific contexts (e.g. James, 2007; Fleming, 2011; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Morrow, 2008). This perspective brought into focus the relational aspects of the construction of these understandings within this research project, which were influenced by contexts with distinct perspectives that frame particular knowledge.

These views informed this study's methodological approach and suggested that the research participants' knowledge, views and perceptions were meaningful components of their social realities and critical pieces to explore in order to realise this project's aim (Mason, 2002). These subjective elements are important components of people's lives and the methodological approach I used endeavoured to ascertain those meanings in depth (Galbin, 2014). Likewise, Davis (2009) argues that the involvement of children and young people in research potentially contributes to produce enhanced understanding of their lives and therefore better research. These stances also influenced my reflexive process and the way I situated myself within this research project. I believe that children and young people can contribute to and enrich research with their distinct perspectives of their first-hand experiences by providing a better understanding of the contexts in which they live

and grow (Kellett, 2005). That is why I acknowledged children and young people's expertise and provided collective spaces for them to engage in the research process.

### **3.4 Critical reflexivity**

As Finlay (2002) points out, researchers in qualitative research play an influential role in data collection and analysis and as a result of that, it is critical to use a reflexive approach to "analyse how subjective and intersubjective elements influence their research" (p531). Similarly, Evens (2016) argues that researchers measure "other cultures and societies by the standards of one's own cultures and social order" (p25), which implies a crucial need for self-awareness of the limits of a researcher's objectivity and how their personal stances may have an impact on the research. Pillow (2003) notes that reflexivity is a thoughtful process of self-awareness that encompasses the construction of meaning amongst those engaged in a research process, including the researchers and the participants who need to acknowledge their own subjectivities and the social and cultural contexts.

According to Roulston and Shelton (2015), discussions of reflexivity have been fruitful but also contested as the positions that researchers take regarding reflexivity vary according to disciplines, theories and epistemologies. They argue that there is a common understanding that social science researchers should position themselves within their research in order to determine how knowledge about the social world is produced and how their stances have an impact on the development of high quality studies. This begs the question of how my own views and epistemological positions



were embedded in this research project. I, however, struggled deciding where to place the reflexive analysis, and I decided to have it early in the thesis than in the findings or conclusion chapter, in order to let the readers know my stances and processes I went through. This will be discussed next.

### **3.4.1 Personal experiences and perspectives**

During my 25 years of professional career in the children's rights and international development fields, I have been inspired and influenced by many children and young people who have given me the opportunity to discover new perspectives and to reflect on new approaches to children and young people's participation. My practitioner experience has shown me that children and young people are eager to move from individual to collective types of participation and from private spheres to public decision-making processes. My understanding of the right to participate has been influenced by my academic background on children's rights, in which I am convinced that the UNCRC has been pivotal in recognising a wide range of rights, including participatory rights. Nevertheless, I am also influenced by the ideological positions that reject the universality of standards as outlined in the UNCRC as its model of childhood is informed by western thinking and values (see also Punch, 2003). I, however, have merged my beliefs of the immense value of the UNCRC with the need to contextualise this global policy instrument through a cross-cultural lens. In this regard, epistemologically, I believe that a human and social reality is constructed where children and young people are active social actors who contribute

to cultural production and change (Corsaro, 2011). This stance signals that children and young people are a diverse social category by nature and their understanding of childhood will vary from one society to another and between communities within the same society (James and James, 2012).

After my exposure to some innovative research experiences conducted by children and young people in Bangladesh, Lebanon and Jordan, I then looked at children and young people's experiences conducting child-led research as an effective way to influence decision-making. I was particularly concerned with critically examining how findings from child-led research have or have not influenced decision-making processes. More broadly, I was interested in investigating the role that children and young people can play in disseminating their research findings and how they handle sensitive issues such as anonymity versus credit for their work and increasing autonomy versus child protection (Tisdall et al., 2009). On reflection, my position, my background in children's rights and my experience in international development and global social justice programmes informed aspects of this research project that were essential to the reflexive process.

### **3.4.2 A reflexive account**

As Finlay (2002) points out, the reflexivity process requires an understanding of the researchers' roles as central figures within the study, as they can influence the participants and results with their own perspectives and beliefs and offers this reflection:

It is vital for researchers to find ways to analyse how subjective and intersubjective elements influence their research. Reflexivity offers one such tool. Here, the researcher engages in an explicit, self-aware meta-analysis of the research process. Through the use of reflexivity, subjectivity in research can be transformed from a problem to an opportunity. (Finlay, 2002, p511)

From this quote, one can infer the crucial importance of a reflexive process and the difficulties that this can bring if it is not done adequately. The use of flexibility offers a methodology to uncover the impact that researchers have on the investigation process, but the engagement in a reflexive practice is challenging, as it requires analysis of subjective elements such as personal stance and self-analysis.

Embracing a reflexivity approach as a methodological tool was a critical component of my research journey and allowed me to understand how I can affect the data based on my personal stances and undertake a self-awareness process to reflect on my own ability to represent others (Pillow, 2003). This process was critical in acknowledging that I was not a neutral individual as I brought my own ontological, epistemological and theoretical assumptions to the research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). Furthermore, reflexivity helped me to pay attention to the subjective side of the research with “a focus on how ... who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect[s] data collection and analysis” (Pillow, 2003, p176). As a researcher, I relied on the reflexivity process throughout the project to understand how my personal history, identity, values, beliefs and knowledge could have an impact on the research. As Finlay (2002) argues, a reflexive analysis should start at the beginning of the research process to help clarify the researcher’s positions and perspectives. Therefore, one of my first actions in the reflexive process was to keep

a research journal to capture my reflections and decisions from the very early stages of my research.

While working on this research project, I used intersectionality a lens, not as a conceptual framework. As a lens, intersectionality helps unpack the findings and shows sensitivity to intersecting inequalities that children and young people experience. My reflections in terms of future research were also influenced by intersectionality and indicated the need to explore further the extent to which identities, power tensions and inequalities have an impact on the ways children and young people experience and understand their participatory rights. At the same time as writing my notes, I started to become aware that my identity, gender, age, education and other factors were a critical part of my perception of the world and that these factors were inevitably influencing the research process. For instance, as a child participation and protection practitioner, I was very concerned about issues of safety and explored the quality of the programmes in which the children and young people participated. However, my role as researcher was to look at the conceptual components of my research, which I neglected to do in the beginning but recovered later according to my reflexive journal. Writing and then reading back over the journal was a remarkable learning and reflection experience that showed me that I was focusing on one aspect of the exploration but not paying attention to another equally important one. Another example I observed was my particular interest in using a reflexive approach with an intersectional lens to understand how my own identities affected my field experience, data collection and analysis (Scott, 2008). I noticed that I was fascinated by the way the relationship between the males and

females was framed by their particular gender roles in each case study and how I related sympathetically to the girls' struggle to be recognised as key players in their child-led research projects. This reflection helped me balance my perspective to look at different angles and not just focus on the deprived position of the girls as vulnerable groups in their respective societies. I shared this reflection with the female participants and they said that they did not feel vulnerable but agreed that there was an ongoing struggle for recognition of their abilities to participate. This interaction was crucial to building new understandings by confronting my beliefs and constructing shared meanings between myself and the research participants (Smith, 2017). This sharing with the research participants also included other actions such as communicating on emerging findings, co-reviewing field notes, discussing methodological issues and debating final conclusions. I believe that by reflecting on these issues, the interaction amongst us was sharpened over the duration of the research process.

### **3.4.3 Insider research**

Literature has explored widely the issue of outsider versus insider research, in which an outsider is an external researcher to the group being researched and the insider is a researcher who is a member of the constituency being studied (e.g. Mercer, 2007; Holstein and Gubrium, 2011; Floyd and Arthur, 2012). Mercer (2007) argues that the dichotomy of outsiders versus insiders should not be the focus whilst analysing the ability of the researcher to conduct ethical or unbiased research, but the pros and cons of insider research should be considered "in relation to access, intrusiveness,

familiarity and rapport” (p6). In a similar vein, Floyd and Arthur (2012) state that while insider research can be problematic, it is also considered beneficial in terms of having easy access to the research setting and building trust based on existing good working relationships. Alderson and Morrow (2004) point out that the insiders who examine their own and/or the organisation’s practices have a familiarity with the context and background of the topic, which can facilitate data collection and analysis processes. However, the insider research might also bring some ethical concerns mainly around struggling with their own pre-conceptions and the way in which the research participants will perceive the inside researcher (Gibbs and Costley, 2006). Floyd and Arthur (2012) argue that these issues can be addressed by establishing appropriate ethical boundaries from the start of the project and reflexive practices throughout the course of the research.

In order to assess the key issue of quality and independence of the research, I reflected on my position as an insider researcher and used this practice to gain self-awareness on how my academic stance and professional role might potentially affect my research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). For instance, through a reflexive analysis process, I explored how my role as Senior Policy Adviser for World Vision, as the gatekeeper, affected my position as a researcher and the impact it had on the research by looking at two questions:

- In what ways does/may this role have an impact on my research?
- How can I maintain independence as the researcher?

Bias was a critical issue to be addressed, as I was aware that there were some potential risks associated with my dual role as researcher and World Vision staff member, which could affect a free and independent study as a result of this working relationship with the gatekeeper. For Roulston and Shelton (2015), this type of dual role could not be completely detached from the other; hence I dedicated extensive efforts and time to reflect on my own potential bias and how to understand and declare my own preconceptions about the subject studied. From the outset, I acknowledged my sympathy to participatory initiatives where children have the opportunity to engage meaningfully, but I was not entirely necessarily predisposed to supporting the child-led research approach and was not the proponent or creator of this approach. Thus, my stance was to explore whether the child-led research approach was effective, and I was not looking to confirm a predetermined belief. In order to address my own possible bias, I followed recommendations from Mercer (2007) and questioned my preconceptions and did not publicise my own stances with the research participants to avoid influencing their views. To minimise the potential confirmation of my beliefs, I continually re-examined the responses from participants and challenged my own assumptions. When interviewing participants, I avoided any reinforcement to positive responses and kept an independent approach towards every issue. I benefitted from sharing data and discussions with my PhD supervisors, as well as numerous conference and teaching presentations, to help ensure I was not unduly biased by researching within my own organisation. The end result is study with critical learning, as discussed in the findings chapters and conclusion, suggesting that such reflexivity assisted in recognise challenges as well as benefits of the child-

led research. Another factor that contributed to minimised bias was the fact that World Vision and its county offices are independent constituencies based on a federal organisational model, and, as a member of the Global Advocacy team, I do not have any direct reporting lines to any of the country offices where case studies were explored. Moreover, this research project was not an evaluation but more conceptual research that interwove ideas and theories related to the topic of this study. The questions asked were not only about what they did per se, but also more about accomplishments and challenges, giving space to the participants to provide recommendations on how to improve the projects in which they participated.

In this reflexive process, I used the guidance provided by the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Framework for Research Ethics (2015) that indicates that it is critical to identify, declare and address any conflict of interest. I addressed this issue by ensuring that I met the standards of integrity, quality and transparency outlined in the research framework. As such, I made clear arrangements with the gatekeeper to ensure that this research was my own project and all decisions regarding the research were made by me in a reflexive way, except those around issues related to security and safety which were governed by the respective gatekeeper (e.g. access to areas of conflict or political instability). In interviews with research participants, I communicated this information to them to ensure there was transparency of my role as a researcher rather than a staff member in this process and set clear expectations amongst all people involved. As Mercer (2007) argues, my position within the organisation gave me the credibility and rapport with the research participants to facilitate their understanding of my role as a researcher and



its separation from my function as an employee. Alderson and Morrow (2004) suggest that the key in succeeding in this separation of roles is making clear to participants when we “are, or are not, wearing our research hat” (p14). I believe this simple strategy worked well during my research project. For instance, some staff members shared their views with me in a non-research context and they asked me not to include their comments in the fieldwork notes as they felt it was appropriate for them to request this to me as the researcher.

#### **3.4.4 Learning through the research project**

In order to have a more meaningful reflexive process, I engaged in a dialogue with the gatekeeper and the participants with an emphasis on mutual learning and cooperation (Finlay, 2002). For instance, I discussed issues with the adult professionals as well as the children and young people, placing all of us as potential contributors in shaping the research process and the findings produced.

In the data collection and analysis phases, bias was also considered in a reflexive process. As Roulston and Shelton (2015) argue, there are multiple forms of bias in social research; some examples include when researchers focus on a particular vision that highlights or obscures an issue, ask leading questions, privilege certain types of data that support their own views, or favour particular samplings or methods with the intention to include a specific population rather than another. At every stage of the research, I reflected and critically reviewed these threats to the research quality and sought to ensure that my views did not limit any emerging themes. As a

regular practice, all research participants' responses were registered in the field notes and used in the analysis phase. Interview schedules were reviewed to avoid leading questions, no opinions were knowingly excluded from the enquiry and a summary of findings were shared with research participants to ensure that the range of views were included and well-represented. This summary was shared via e-mail with the adult participants and via informal face-to-face meetings with most of the child participants, which was facilitated by the local staff members in the two case studies.

As my research involved adults as well as children and young people as respondents, it was critical to use a reflexivity lens to understand the relationships between the research participants and myself as the researcher. As Connolly (2015) argues, it was unviable – and undesirable – to separate myself from the research participants, as research is a process formed by these relationships and its meanings are constructed based on these interactions. As a researcher, my interactions with adult professionals and children and young people were different based on the characteristics of the groups. For instance, adult respondents were similar to me in terms of age, knowledge and professional experience. On the other hand, the children and young people were under 18 years of age with different life experiences, most of them did not speak English and many perceived me as an adult with a certain level of authority. In order to build rapport with both groups, I reflected on our differences and similarities to achieve good interactions and used different techniques. I also embraced learning alongside the children, an approach recommended by Davis (2009), in which I avoided to place myself as a person with

all the answers. On the contrary, I adopted a learner role where I learned together with the young participants and built joint understandings of the context and culture.

In the reflexive process, I noticed that issues around ethnicity, social class, age, gender and other structural categories affected the way I interacted with the children and young people (Scott, 2008), but were not as apparent whilst working with the adult respondents. For instance, I noticed in interviews that children and young people perceived foreigners as “celebrities”. This association presented itself in their excitement of meeting someone from abroad and culminated in many questions about my country, family and work. At the beginning, I tried to be just another person in the room, but this did not work because of my status as a foreigner. I then turned this distraction into a rapport-building opportunity to create a more relaxed environment, which worked very well based on the participants’ feedback. Ultimately, as the children and young people saw me as someone external from their communities, they perceived that I would have some degree of neutrality regarding situations in their countries and communities. For instance, the Syrian refugee children felt rejected and discriminated by the host populations in Lebanon and Jordan and were afraid to give information to Lebanese and Jordanian colleagues based on that lack of trust with the locals. When they knew that I was a foreigner like them, they appeared to feel more comfortable and were more open to talk to me. They and the gatekeeper’s staff confirmed this observation in the feedback sessions.

Additionally, I constantly reflected on power issues that may result from my social position, gender and education, amongst other factors that might affect the relationship between the research participants and myself (Roulston and Shelton,

2015). Based on these considerations, I made efforts to minimise some power and authority by seeking horizontal relationships with the participants, valuing their inputs and contributions, and recognising their expertise and experience. I noticed that the children and young people wanted to please me with their answers as they expected some positive outcomes from this process, so I explained to them that this was not an evaluation and that I was learning from their experiences; therefore, all positive and negative aspects were important for me to learn about in order to improve their projects.

In choosing research methods, I reflected, for instance, whether the use of creative methods with children and young people could undermine the young participants and place me in a position of authority. For example, as O’Kane (2008) argues, some techniques can be patronising and make participants feel that they are less intelligent or have limited abilities. Moreover, these reflexive exercises also helped me assess the challenges and limitations that emerged whilst using these methods, such as inadequacy or inapplicability according to cultural contexts (Punch, 2002). In this regard, it was vital to reflect on and adapt the techniques to the needs of the specific group of children and young people, especially taking into account age, culture and skills.

The use of interpreters during fieldwork was another matter that required extensive reflection in order to understand and deal with how they affected the interview and focus group dynamics. Temple and Edwards (2002) point out that interpreters inevitably bring their own assumptions and perspectives to the research process and that this needs to be addressed in order to avoid a misperception of the

roles of researcher and interpreter. For instance, I did not expect that having a male interpreter in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study would affect the way in which the girls were able to participate. However, based on cultural restrictions, they were less keen to have a male interpreter. When I noticed this issue, I reflected on some possible solutions; I did not replace the interpreters as an initial reaction, but instead I carried out some icebreakers to overcome these gender dynamics. The children and young people seemed fine after the icebreakers and reported positive responses in a later feedback session. Further discussion about interpretation can be found in later sections.

To sum up, reflexive practice was an essential component of this research project from the articulation of the research questions to the data collection and finally the analysis stage in order to examine how my ontological and epistemological assumptions had an impact on the research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) and to take measures to minimise any negative impact that these could have on the quality of this project. This reflexive practice was embedded as a critical feature in the research design phase, which is discussed next.

### **3.5 Research design**

This project is aligned with a qualitative research paradigm and I adopted several methods for data collection, including focus groups, semi-structured interviews, observations and documentary review. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) point out, a qualitative approach facilitates a data collection process that is sensitive to the

participants, supports the inclusion of people's own views and allows multifaceted description and interpretation of the issues. I chose qualitative research because this was a suitable approach to explore more in depth the personal knowledge, experiences and attitudes of the research participants (Ritchie, 2009). This can be done quantitatively, but a qualitative approach is more suitable when the problem needs to be explored and the context or settings of participants need to be understood (Bloor and Wood, 2006). This choice is connected with the epistemological position of this research project that emphasises constructed understandings of the world that form the foundations for mutual assumptions about reality (Gergen, 1999).

Furthermore, as the majority of participants were children and young people, qualitative methodology was an appropriate approach to enable participants to engage in a meaningful and sensitive way (Darbyshire et al., 2005). In support, Gallagher (2009) argues that qualitative methodologies have been widely used in research with children and young people and they are consistent with the ontological approach of children and young people as active social actors and experts on their own lives. The qualitative methodology was also an effective means for adult respondents to express and articulate perceptions, values, feelings and understanding, including their own experiences and stories (Blaikie, 2009).

### 3.5.1 Case study approach

Case studies have been used in many disciplines as an approach to gaining a deeper knowledge of individual, group, organisational and social occurrences with the aim of understanding complex social phenomena (Yin, 2014). In literature, there is rising conceptual recognition of case study research as a method to be used across a range of disciplines in order to explore and understand reality (e.g. Gomm et al., 2000; Creswell 2007; Hancké, 2009; Simons 2009). As an example, Mitchell (2000) argues that a large number of social anthropological and sociological research studies have been conducted using the case study method, helping it become a consistent and respectable technique for social analysis. As advocates for case study research, Yin (2014) and Stake (2006) have developed structured approaches to how case studies should be designed, conducted and analysed.

Stake (2006) defines case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p2). Stake expands on this by explaining that the case is one amongst others; for instance, if schools were the case, the case study would be one or more specific schools. Similarly, Yin (2014) points out that a “case study allows investigators to focus on a ‘case’ and retain a holistic and real-world perspective” (p4) and further defines it as an empirical enquiry that:

...investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. (Yin, 2014, p16)

In this definition, Yin highlights that the purpose of the case study is to profoundly explore what is happening and understand how the context influences the case. In this sense, the case study approach delimits the object of a study to a specific case, which could be a unit or entity that the research can define and distinguish (Merriam, 1998). Likewise, Stake (2003) points out that a case study is a choice of object to be studied; in that, it is both a process of learning and a product of that learning. In the same vein, Hancké (2009) argues that case study research is a flexible and powerful tool used in research strategies in order to test theories and explore social realities of a particular case in order to generate new information and better arguments to understand these data within specific contexts.

Stake (2003) identifies three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. An intrinsic case study seeks a comprehensive understanding of a particular individual case; an instrumental case study examines a particular case to provide insight into a more general issue; and a collective case study is also instrumental but involves more than one case for comparison. In a similar fashion, Yin (2014) classifies case study research as both single and multiple case studies. A single case study refers to one object of analysis to be studied in depth. A multiple case study, which can be also called comparative case method, is a distinct form of study choosing several objects for analysis based on their similarities and differences. The multiple case method has the expressed purpose of looking at different situations in order to make comparisons (Thomas, 2011).



### **3.5.1.1 Benefits and limitations of case study approach**

One of the most recognised benefits of the case study is that its methodological approach combines the analysis of three factors: (a) the time and space that define the case study, (b) how the case study relates to the rest of the world, and (c) the particular theories that are used to explore and understand the case study (Hancké, 2009). Gomm and colleagues (2000) similarly suggests another advantage of the case study, as in-depth research method is the ability to explore and study people's lives and matters in connection with their contexts in different spaces and times but with the analysed individuals at the centre. Furthermore, Flyvbjerg (2006) believes that the effectiveness of this approach lies with its ability to thoroughly focus on a particular group of respondents and explore the context, events and circumstances that build a case.

Simons (2009), additionally notes an alternative advantage of the case study is its accessibility to respondents located in a specific place in a particular time where a researcher can obtain information that could not be gained in another way. Based on the information gathered, the case study can then provide a better understanding of society by comparing one case to another, allowing the researcher to see different things through a different lens. In the same vein, Yin (2014) points out that this method is beneficial for exploratory research that uses 'what' questions as these are mainly exploratory, resulting in greater support to the researcher to understand social phenomena as it fits well into the study social phenomenon.

While there are many benefits, the case study approach has also been subject to a number of criticisms as its methods are said to present some limitations, such as a lack of breadth, absence of methodological rigour and inability to generalise the results (e.g. Verschuren, 2003; Bennett and Elman, 2006). Thomas (2011) concurs that one of the foremost hazards of this approach is researchers' tendency to be very descriptive and not very analytical of a case's features, especially around the differences between cases and their connections to theories.

Regarding critics' arguments that a major constraint of case studies is their lack of breadth as there are a broad range of issues that a case study will not cover, Stake (2003) agrees that while this is a recurrent limitation, this disadvantage is countermanded by the in-depth information that a case study can provide. Stake also points out that this complexity is reached by the use of multiple sources of information and the opportunity to examine the case as a whole.

The second criticism concerns the method's lack of rigour, which may affect the quality of the results or compromise the weight of the findings due to poor methodological considerations (Maoz, 2002). Stake (2006) and Yin (2014) agree that the absence of efficient and organised techniques associated with the case study may weaken research rigorousness, but they also contend that the development of extensive methodological techniques and epistemological grounding ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the case study approach.

The argument that this approach has an inability to generalise results is centred on the belief that this technique focuses on particular cases within specific contexts, its results cannot be widespread (e.g. Donmoyer, 2000; Gomm et al., 2000).

However, Yin (2014) points out that the case study approach is not to extrapolate probabilities or statistical generalisations but to expand and generalise theories, known as analytic generalisations (see also Mitchell, 2000). In the same vein, Flyvbjerg (2006) notes that the generalisability of case studies is correlated to a good selection of cases, which can provide rich insights on how these cases are intertwined to theories in a logical manner.

### **3.5.2 Selection of case studies**

There were several critical factors taken into account when choosing this approach, such as the existence of appropriate case studies to investigate the phenomena, a clear purpose of the case study and the option to explore and interrogate the cases chosen (Stake, 2003). First, the approach was chosen in order to explore the claims made by two groups of children and young people that asserted that they conducted child-led research in order to influence decision-making on issues relevant to them, which were publicised in several reports and publications. Second, there was a clear purpose with this selection to understand a real-world situation and explore the experiences and insights of the participants and the contextual conditions that framed the two case studies (Yin, 2014). Hence, this approach was an effective means to explore and understand how the members of a particular group “did what they did” (Brown, 2008, p2). Thus, by using a case study approach, this research project achieved its goal of exploring the different participants’ perspectives and understanding how context and other factors affected change. I was also able to

examine the studies' characteristics, accessibility and ability to respond to the research questions in my study based on case study category criteria:

- Key case: a good example for something, a classic or exemplary case.
- Outlier case: an exception showing something interesting because of its difference from the norm.
- Local knowledge case: an example of something in your personal experience on which you want to find out more (Thomas, 2011, p77).

By using a combination of these three groupings in addition to the considerations outlined by Yin and Stake, I decided to select to case studies that were recognisable examples of children and young people acting as researchers and conducting their own child-led research within an international development programme context. The two cases were outliers in that they were different from other cases with an innovative and different viewpoint on children and young people's participation. Whilst these case studies were similar in their approaches to engaging children and young people to influence decision-making, both were different from other participatory projects. This made them interesting to study as they used child-led research as a means to involve them in decision-making; most of the traditional forms are children's clubs, councils and parliaments. Thirdly, I was familiar with the case studies as they were implemented by World Vision country offices. I had seen them included in global reports about children and young peoples' participation initiatives and had access to all the information. My interest and position within the supporting organisation allowed me access to the richness and depth of these two cases, which would be unavailable to me otherwise (Thomas, 2011).

This preliminary knowledge peaked my interest in these two cases and motivated me to learn more in order to understand dimensionally these participants' experiences by exploring how this child-led research developed. Some of the questions I asked included:

- How were children and young people able to conduct this research?
- What were the processes and outcomes of their work as young researchers?
- How did the child-led research contribute to World Vision's and the young researchers' broader understanding of children and young people's participation?

When deciding on a case study type, I used Yin's (2014) classification in order to include a multiple case study approach in my research design frame. Literature seems to support this approach, as it points out that adopting a multiple case study approach increases the chances of gaining a better understanding of a social phenomenon by studying the distinct contexts (e.g. Stake, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). Similarly, Gray (2009) advocates for utilising a multiple case study approach when the research project benefits from looking at different situations and making comparisons to find out more about the cases. This approach however, requires, a level of knowledge by the researcher of these levels of difference between one another (Thomas, 2011). Yet by thoroughly studying the settings and examining the relationships and processes for emerging patterns at the selected sites it is still possible to mitigate any disadvantage (Hancké, 2009). Thus, I examined each case in depth in order to get rich insights into an issue and then compare the information gathered from both studies and learn more through the further analysis of issues, contexts and cultures where these phenomena took place (Mitchell, 2000). The prior

knowledge I had about the cases was critical in their selection as they brought significant levels of similarities and difference between one another, which was beneficial during the analysis (Thomas, 2011). This choice also responded to the need to investigate the child-led research experience within a specific place, context and time (Mitchell, 2000) while still allowing the investigation into the wider issues of how the children and young people used their research to participate in decision-making. By also including the multiple case approach, I was able to gain in-depth insight into specific issues such the participants' motivations, perceptions, contexts, process and outcomes in each case and then compare how actions and events were connected to one another through theoretical principles (Verschuren, 2003). In order to explore the relationship and processes within these cases, I used multiple methods and data sources, such as interviews, focus groups, participant observation and documentary review (Thomas, 2011), which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. These methods allowed me to gather information from different sources, such as participants' experiences, the historical background, the settings and the multiple, interrelated contexts (e.g. economic, political and legal) (Stake, 2003).

### **3.5.3 Screening case studies**

After I developed the selection criteria for the case studies and harmonised it with the research questions (Thomas, 2001), I started screening potential projects to find appropriate cases. Prior to case selection, I collected information to find cases that

met the specific characteristics laid out in Table 1. This process took a considerable amount of work, as I had to collect all of the relevant information in order to ensure that I selected the best candidates based on the criteria. I did this by thoroughly reviewing reports, an internal World Vision database and responses to questionnaires sent to country offices.

Table 1 reflects the operational criteria developed to determine which projects qualified to serve as case studies in this report. Using this type of framework is helpful in determining which cases have the most data sources available and best accessibility to participants with rich information (De Vaus, 2001). Having specific criteria for choosing finalists ensures that the screening process is methodical and allow the researcher to revisit earlier decisions about selected cases and remove any irrelevant cases (Thomas, 2011). As one of the key characteristics was that the project had to be part of a World Vision-implemented international development programme, the selection phase was more straightforward because I had experience with this type of case in my professional role at World Vision. As mentioned earlier, World Vision was keen to explore the use of child-led research in their programmes as a way to understand how this approach might improve their child participation projects.

**Table 1 Case study selection criteria**

Criteria	Description	Case Study Candidates			
		Armenia	Bangladesh	Brazil	Lebanon& Jordan
Organisational setting	Initiatives must be conducted within international development programmes supported by World Vision.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Existence of child participation programmes	Case study projects must be embedded within current child participation programmes, not a stand-alone initiative, at a World Vision country office. This criterion aims to ensure that the analysis covers organisational policies and practices.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child-led research conducted by children and young people, aged 12 to 18	The child-led research must be conducted using an approach where children and young people are involved in all stages of the research – from planning, fieldwork and analysis to dissemination.	No – this project was reviewed and defined as a participatory, local-level assessment	Yes	No – this project was determined to be a popular mobilisation	Yes
Research conducted within specific contexts	The research must take place within diverse contexts to enable exploration into how contexts have an impact on the ability of young researchers to conduct and disseminate their own research.	Poverty gaps in a middle-income country	Turbulent political context	Violence and racial discrimination	Armed conflict
Timeframe	Projects must be conducted between 2012 and 2015.	2014	2015	2013	2013-2014
Research topics	Research themes must be related to children's rights.	Access to public health	Birth registration	Discrimination & violence against black people	Refugee children
Access to respondents who participated in the child-led research	Researcher must have access to the children and young people who engaged in the child-led research, who are reachable and keen to participate in this study, as well as any staff members who supported them during the project.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Available documentation	Researcher must have access to multiple sources of information to illustrate the cases, including reports, design documents, blogs, videos and media coverage, in addition to the researcher-led interviews and focus groups.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Feasibility and accessibility to in the country	There must be safe and easy access to the research location, according to country risk assessments, and the gatekeeper must agree to the researcher conducting fieldwork.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



This first criterion eased the process, as I was aware of some relevant cases from the outset and could easily arrange to access the research details (Yin, 2014). Initially, I selected three candidates that I thought would meet the essential selection criteria. These included research studies conducted by children and young people in Lebanon, Brazil and Armenia. I analysed the cases according to each aspect of the conditions and accepted Lebanon and Brazil as case studies since their child-led research appeared to meet critical aspects of the outlined criteria. I dismissed the study conducted by the children and young people in Armenia as it was not child-led research, as defined by this report, and I saw it more as a local-level, participatory advocacy assessment.

Once I decided upon the inclusion of these two case studies, I travelled to Brazil to conduct pre-fieldwork. During this trip, I carried out a second screening process. Based on the information provided the respondents, I concluded that the inclusion of the Brazil case was inappropriate for this study since it did not help answer the research questions (De Vaus, 2001). The work in question was led by children and young people, but was in actuality a popular mobilisation, where they conducted participatory assessments, and based on their results, they mobilised the community around specific social justice issues, such as violence against black and poor youth from *favelas*. However, the screening did not show that they conducted child-led research in order to acquire the data for their advocacy work. While the reports I reviewed and the questionnaires answered by staff members indicated that the children and young people had engaged in child-led research, they were unable to provide evidence demonstrating that it had taken place. This issue was apparently

due to their use of the same terminology when referring to different types of processes or projects. They referred to participatory assessment, a very different type of enquiry, as child-led research. As the Brazil case turned out to be unviable, I explored other candidates, and Bangladesh arose as a qualified case study as it met all of the selection criteria. The Lebanon case study originally only included children and young people from the Bekaa site, but pre-fieldwork indicated that this group worked jointly with Syrian refugees based in Irbid, Jordan. As the child-led research could not be properly explored with just one group of participants contributing, the decision was made to merge both sites into one case study.

Based on the results of this screening process, the goal of which was to ensure that case studies were properly identified prior to data collection (Yin, 2014), I selected two projects to study. For the purposes of this research report, I named the one that took place in Bangladesh, *Dhaka*, and the one conducted in Lebanon and Jordan, *Bekaa and Irbid*. Both case studies were selected in order to provide deep and abundant data based on the reflections and insights of participants (Thomas, 2011). This selection also took into account my professional experience in international development over the last two decades and engagement with children and young people in participation programmes globally, especially those suffering from poverty, injustice or disasters. I was also interested in exploring how refugee children cope with new contexts and realise their right to participate in challenging environments. I asked myself how these international development programmes provide children and young people with opportunities to participate, to what extent the children and young people benefit from their participation in these initiatives and

the impact of this participation. I also questioned how this work could be expanded into other settings, if the programmes were working well.

I personally and professionally engaged with refugee children throughout the Middle East whilst I was based in Lebanon for 9 years. I had first-hand knowledge of World Vision's programmes and their field offices' struggle to create spaces for children and young people to participate in grassroots initiatives. This contact with the refugee crisis encouraged me to look at the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study from a different angle, with a mix of professional and academic interest. Bangladesh, on the other hand, was new to me as I had not worked directly with World Vision's Bangladesh office nor had I visited the country. However, I was intrigued by the work they were doing with children and young people living in such harsh contexts. World Vision Bangladesh became a learning hub for me, due to the quality of work its staff produced and their availability and willingness to document and reflect on their experiences.

I advocated for the selection of these two cases which had similarities in terms of their objectives and methodologies but were slightly contrasting in terms of the context and social set up that provided different views of a social phenomenon in study (see Bennett and Elman, 2006). Furthermore, their accessibility combined with their uniqueness, made them valuable to this current study (Simons, 2009). Each case was rich in its own right, but the combination of both provided a complexity that benefitted my research. Their selection was influenced by my role as an insider, but that was just one aspect of several determining factors. The inclusion of any given child-led research was also dependent on meeting all of the selection criteria to

ensure that this decision was scientifically objective (Yin, 2014). The cases and their characteristics will be discussed in more detail in the following sections and their contexts will be reviewed in Chapter Four.

#### **3.5.4 Time boundaries of the research project**

As seen in Table 2, the child-led research projects studied in my research were carried in different timeframes (between 2013 and 2015) and my fieldwork was conducted after that, between November 2015 and July 2016. As Gray (2009) argues a retrospective study looks backwards and encompasses the collection of information of events that happened in the past. This implies that the research examines an outcome that is established at the start of the study. There multiple choices of time to study, including current or past events. Ruspini (2000) argues that retrospective studies have been subject of criticism as these can have difficulties such as accessing documentation and in finding the research participants. Moreover, if the participants are found they can generate a recall bias as they experience some difficulties to accurately remember the events that happened in the past and misinterpret information (Abbot and Tsay, 2000).

I decided to study events that happened in the past as these were relevant to my project and the screening process that I conducted did not show current project, within the selection criteria, that could be investigated. This decision was made because the two case were worth of studying and I was able to look at what happened in the past by interviewing the people who participated in the two cases

and having access to documents that contained rich information about the cases (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). In order to make this decision, I used the following strategy adapted from Gray (2009) to mitigate the limitations that this choice may have:

- Ensure access to essential documentation to explore the case studies
- To stay within the boundaries set by the timeframe: 2012 to 2015
- Reasonable evidence to believe that most of participants can be found and recruited
- Use of multiple methods to reduce misinterpretation or lack of precise information on some elements of the situations. This includes documentary review and observation as supplementary of interviews and focus groups.

**Table 2 Time boundaries of study**

	Start date	End date	Total months
Child-led research in <i>Bekaa and Irbid</i> case study	December 2013	March 2014	4
Child-led research in <i>Dhaka</i> case study	January 2015	September 2015	6
My research project's fieldwork	November 2015	July 2016	9

### 3.5.5 Characteristics of the selected case studies

This research project included two case studies that can be briefly summarised as follow:

- ***Bekaa and Irbid* study:** This was project conducted in Lebanon and Jordan, where children and young people who fled Syria's civil war found refuge. These groups

of heavily war-affected children and young people embarked on a participatory process to research issues that affected them in their new host countries with the support of World Vision. The young researchers led their own research and developed research questionnaires, collected and analysed data and prioritised their findings in order to provide a set of recommendations on how to make a change in their lives. This project was carried from December 2013 to March 2014. The final research report was launched in March 2014 to mark the third anniversary of the war in Syria.

- **Dhaka case study:** This comprised of a project conducted in Bangladesh with children and young people who were members of a local Children's Parliament. A number of the members led a research project on the issue of the lack of birth certificates and its negative impact on the well-being of Bangladeshi children. The children and young people managed the project from the conceptualisation of research questions to the dissemination of their findings. This project was carried from January and September 2015.

The *Dhaka* and *Bekaa and Irbid* case studies were selected primarily because they provided a rich source of data to assist in answering the research questions. Their similarities and differences supported this approach. Similarities included the fact that both cases included children and young people between the ages of 12 to 18 who participated in projects supported by the gatekeeper, World Vision, and conducted child-led research as part of the organisation's initiatives. Secondly, both projects used similar methodology for the child-led research even though they were

developed separately. They shared related objectives and utilised similar procedures to measure the progress of their initiatives, basing their analysis on the project design documents outlined in the child led-research. Furthermore, both groups of young researchers claimed that their research was child-led and their findings were used as a means to influence decision-making on issues relevant to their lives (World Vision Bangladesh, 2015; Pennikian, 2014).

In terms of differences, young researchers from the *Dhaka* case study investigated issues around birth registration and those in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study researched the impact the refugee situation had on children and young people. Also, the studies were located in very different geographical, political and social contexts. The *Dhaka* research was conducted in Bangladesh by local children and young people who were members of a children's parliament and supported by the gatekeeper. The *Bekaa and Irbid* research took place in Lebanon and Jordan and was conducted by Syrian refugee children and young people who had fled their home country looking for safety due to the ongoing armed conflict in Syria. Another difference was how the young researchers used their findings to disseminate their research and influence change. For instance, the young researchers from *Dhaka* launched a public event to announce their findings and those from *Bekaa and Irbid* published a report and liaised with staff members at World Vision's global level to disseminate it.

The similarities and differences outlined above provide rich information needed to compare and analyse the cases (Lewis and McNaughton, 2014). Similarities between the case studies were critical to make comparability worthwhile

and some differences were illuminating in their implications. Furthermore, these features were crucial to exploring how the diverse contexts in which children and young people conducted their research determined the opportunities and limitations that child-led research poses and defined the different strategies they used to disseminate their findings and influence decision-making. In-depth information about the contexts and features of these child-led research projects will be discussed in Chapter Four.

### **3.5.6 Selection of the case studies' participants**

As Thomas (2011) points out, when utilising a case study approach, the most appropriate sampling strategy is a non-probability sample, which includes two broad types of sampling: convenience and purposive. I chose a purposive sampling, which selects samples based on the characteristics of a population and research aims, as the preferred approach to recruiting participants for this study (Blaikie, 2009). This is a useful strategy to cover key, relevant constituencies and ensure enough diversity within the sample's boundaries of the defined population (Ritchie et al., 2014). Stake (2003) argues that purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose contributors based on their accessibility and from whom the researcher can learn the most. By defining the specific characteristics of the participants, the researcher is also able to explore the central themes covered in the study (Patton, 2014). By adopting this method, I was able to select participants with the characteristics and knowledge needed to answer my research questions, as this information could not be gained through any other sampling strategies (Gray, 2009).



As this research project sought to involve all participants from the two case studies, the following selection criteria was outlined based on recommendations laid out by Lofland and Lofland (1995): (a) participants from whom we can obtain in-depth data, (b) participants who have familiarity with the setting and (c) participants who are accessible and open to participate in the study. Based on these features, the research participants for this project were defined as (1) the children and young people, aged 12 to 18 (20 females and 14 males), who were associated with World Vision programmes and engaged in the child-led research projects within their constituencies in the *Irbid and Bekaa* and *Dhaka* case studies and (2) the adult professionals who acted as facilitators of child-led research projects and those who worked in the design of these projects or dissemination of their findings (10 females and 4 males).

These participants were those who were best suited to provide the information needed, as they were fully involved in the child-led research projects and had in-depth knowledge to contribute. Furthermore, this criteria also enabled me to choose the participants who had the characteristics and information required to answer the research questions (Gray, 2009). The selection process was also framed by possibility to recruit research participants who were reachable and keen to engage in this project. Whilst reflecting on sample choices, the aim of this project was to include the entire population of young researchers from both cases; however, some were unreachable or chose not to participate. The total number of young researchers in *Bekaa and Irbid* was 40 children and young people, with 18 contributing to this research, and there were 25 initial children and young people in *Dhaka* case study

with 16 joining this study. Regarding the adult participants, the initial sample considered three adults in *Bekaa and Irbid* and two in *Dhaka*, however this number increased to six and eight respectively.

As seen in Tables 3 and 4, the sample populations included 26 participants in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study and 23 participants from the *Dhaka* case study. The age range determination for child participants was made based on the ages of these two groups of children and young people. This sampling was considered adequate to fulfil the data collection methods chosen and enabled me to have in-depth interactions with the participants while giving them the possibility to engage in the project in a meaningful manner (Gallagher, 2009). The inclusion of adults as participants helped me answer the research questions two and three more fully by gaining their perspectives, beliefs and attitudes on the children and young people's role in influencing decision-making through the child-led research. Moreover, I gained valuable knowledge from these professionals on how (or whether) child-led research initiatives provided opportunities to influence decision-making.

**Table 3 *Bekaa and Irbid* case study participants**

Participants	Females	Males	Total
Children and young people (aged 12 to 18)	12	6	18
Adult professionals	6	2	8
<b>Total</b>			<b>26</b>

**Table 4 *Dhaka* case study participants**

Participants	Females	Males	Total
Children and young people (aged 12 to 17)	8	8	16
Adult professionals	4	2	6
<b>Total</b>			<b>22</b>

This research project initially planned to include decision makers from governments and UN agencies, but I was unable to connect with many sources. I used strategies to reach these high-levels officers, including emails, making phone calls or by mutual acquaintances to invite them to participate. None of the individuals contacted agreed to participate. Most of the reasons were the lack of time, new portfolios and responsibilities, difficulties in asking permission to participate in the research and for some their involvement in the projects was far in the past that they felt they could not effectively recall their experience.

An issue that I reflected on when recruiting adult participants was the possibility of selection bias. In order to address this, I used criteria that included the selection of participants who represented, to a certain extent, a diversity of experiences within the research (Platt, 1981). For instance, key features were: adult facilitators who supported the young researchers, staff members who were involved in the design of the child-led research projects or assisted them in disseminating the

findings of their child-led research. Originally I planned to include four adult participants from each site; however, this number was adjusted accordingly to include those whom emerged as relevant respondents. As anticipated, the number of research participants was an adequate size to answer the research questions as this study was narrow in focus and participants were deeply knowledgeable about the subject matter (Morse, 2000).

### **3.5.7 The access and recruitment of participants**

After presenting my credentials and developing a terms of reference, my fieldwork was approved by the Research and Ethics Committee at the School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh. I then contacted World Vision, the gatekeeper of both case studies, to move forward with the project. The initial process was very smooth and the organisation assigned key persons to liaise with me and provide administrative and logistical support as needed. I led participant recruitment as the researcher and conducted it in three steps:

1. Suitable participants were identified with the help of the point persons.
2. Potential participants were contacted in person (during their regular activities at the community centres) and the purpose of the research project fully explained. In some cases, I contacted some of the adult professionals via email with an invitation to participate in the research along with an information leaflet.
3. Personal consent was obtained for all participants, as well as consent from parents or caregivers for child participants (refer to consent forms in Appendix A).

However, at this stage I encountered some challenges that mostly surrounded the second and third steps of finding the children and young people who were identified as suitable participants. This also included strategies to motivate them to participate in the project, gain their and their parents' consent, and find a suitable and safe place to interview them as the contexts where they lived were highly politicised and required extra security measures to ensure the participants' safety.

An initial obstacle was the identification and finding of the children and young people who had participated in the child-led research, in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, as the child participants were Syrian refugees settled in several refugee camps and other spontaneous settlements across Lebanon and Jordan. Reaching these participants was difficult due to the tense political situation where the host countries were struggling to respond to the needs of not only the refugees but also their own citizens (UNICEF, 2014). In Irbid, initially as stated, I was assured it would not be a problem to recruit the participants but then it took about four weeks to find the children and young people as the gatekeeper had lost contact with them since they had initially participated in the child-led research via a local partner agency and not directly with the gatekeeper. After weeks of unsuccessful efforts to find them, the local office advised me not to proceed with the research, reasoning that the refugee families were hesitant to give out information about the child participants as they had strong feelings of distrust in general due to their vulnerable situation and deprived living conditions (World Vision, 2014b). Despite a sense of frustration, the staff members were fully supportive of the project and decided to carry out a last attempt, a local staff member visited a school where she thought she could find one

of the participants. Using a photograph taken on the last day of the child-led research project, they found a girl who was part of the project and she then helped the staff members to identify and connect with the other children and young people. From the 20 initial young researchers, 12 could not be located, but the eight who were still living in the same refugee camp all agreed to participate in this research project. I made all efforts possible to mitigate any potential bias in the recruitment as I tried to reach them all, especially those more marginalised. Though, due to the limitation of the refugee context, some young researchers who originally participated in the child-led research were not found. However, it was crucial to be able to at least attempt this research with the children and young people who were reachable. In Lebanon, the process was much simpler as the gatekeeper stayed in contact with the group of young researchers after the research concluded, which helped facilitate the recruitment process. Of the 20 original participants, seven had moved to other areas of the country and were unreachable and three had gone to Turkey in an attempt to cross into Europe. The remaining 10 participants agreed to join this project.

In the *Dhaka* case study, civil unrest, threats of terrorism and ongoing political conflict made the country and its capital city a very unstable and unsafe place at the time I was conducting fieldwork (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015). This situation affected the local office's ability to reconnect and recruit the young researchers as many of them were from areas that faced some degree of security challenges. The recruitment process and fieldwork were suspended for several weeks until the political tension stabilised. Once World Vision's security department reassessed the situation and allowed the fieldwork to commence, invitations were sent to 25

children and young people, and 16 participants joined the study. The other nine children and young people were either unable to be located or did not wish to participate.

In order to ensure minimum selection bias, I asked staff members who supported me in reaching the child participants the reasons why nine children and young people did not join the research and how can we ensure that they were not arbitrarily excluded? They assumed that they may not have accepted the invitation because they were either busy at school or uninterested in the activity, and, based on their own experiences, they said that children and young people were completely free to join or decline the invitation. As a researcher, I reflected about potential exclusion and inequalities produced by the recruitment process and analysed my role and possible mitigation strategies. One of the major limitations I anticipated it was the fact that being a researcher who is a foreigner, who does not speak the local language and is bounded by tight security, I needed to trust the decision of the gatekeepers but at the same time ensure that they understand bias in recruitment and the ways to reduce it.

### **3.5.8 Preparing the ground**

When preparing for the fieldwork, I spent an extensive amount of time engaging the local staff members in the research process and explaining to them in detail all of the stages of the project as I have previously witnessed some level of distrust between researchers and practitioners that then affected the implementation of the

fieldwork. This approach helped improve their understanding of the research project while building trust and support (Morton, 2015). I noticed that my proactive approach to engaging the staff members also minimised the risk of conflicts and ensured that all parties involved communicated their expectations prior to agreeing to participate.

In order to benefit from children's expertise in undertaking the PhD research project, I recruited five children and young people during the preparatory phase and invited them to become my research advisory group. These five participants were three girls and two boys who took part in the child-led research project *from the Bekaa and Irbid* case study, and they were asked to discuss and provide feedback on the research project, its methods, and likely focus groups and interview questions. Recruitment of this advisory group was through the gatekeeper's staff who contacted and invited them to attend a meeting with me to explore their ideas and perspectives on the research I was planning to conduct. All of the children and young people agreed to join this group as they said it was exciting and appealing, and the children and young people subsequently signed the research consent form. In support of having advisory members as part of the research process Lundy and McEvoy (2009) (2014) argue that inviting a team of people to advise researchers on their studies is an empowering and beneficial practice as the advisory members can ensure that the research is connected to the needs and priorities of participants, and tailor the research process based on their feedback. These five young advisors provided feedback on the methodology, duration and content of the sessions. They also provided integral feedback on the ethics and consent forms as they felt they were



complicated and had too many questions that could easily worry the participants and their parents. This resonates with Davis (2009) who argues that to meaningfully engage children and young people in research, researchers must invest time and resources with a special focus on the processes, outcomes and the relationship between adults and children and young people. Armed with this knowledge, I was able to amend the forms accordingly and instructed the translators to use simple language when translating the documents into the local languages. The five young researchers also provided me with input on the interview schedules and gave me some ideas on topics to cover. For instance, they commented on the limited questions concerning their feelings and personal experiences as most of the questions were focused on collective understandings. They also noted that some concepts were difficult to understand; for instance, the process and outcomes seemed very abstract so they suggested clarifying these terms with examples. I utilised all of their suggestions in the subsequent interview schedule.

At the end of the preparatory sessions, the children and young people expressed they were thrilled by the decision to include them as collaborators at this early stage of the research process, not just as interviewees. They explained they are often invited to participate in research and evaluations, but they normally are only asked to respond to questions and not provide feedback on the style of the questionnaires or the methods used. They said that this preparatory session was very helpful to better understand the research project and they felt they were able to contribute good ideas to the process, as they also knew how to conduct research.

They maintained a feeling of becoming good researchers and wanted opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in new projects.

### **3.6 Data collection methods and procedures**

The qualitative mixed methods chosen to carry out this study were focus groups, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and documentary review. The decision to have multiple sources of evidence was taken in order to fully answer the research questions and cover a broad range of topics (Yin, 2014). Combining several collection methods adds significant value to the data gathering process. Where one method can explore issues or illuminate hidden aspects, other techniques can bring to light other matters (Lewis and McNaughton, 2014). For instance, focus groups might explore preliminary themes that could be investigated further using semi-structured interviews and then compared to observations to reveal aspects that may be less likely to emerge during conversations with research participants. Document review supplements these methods by contributing to the understanding of the values and perceptions of those who developed the documents and providing insight into the research subject (Angers and Machtmes, 2005).

The combination of these four qualitative methods in my research project provided opportunities to gather richer information and understandings from multiple sources using a number of techniques. Ritchie (2009) supports a mixed method approach, arguing that research projects benefit from each method's different insights. Similarly, Gray (2009) argues that the use of multiple methods

helps to balance the strengths and weaknesses of each method, ensuring that the data collected are rich and extensive. Furthermore, Darbyshire and colleagues (2005) believe that a single method is unlikely to capture a wide range of experiences and perceptions of research participants, especially when trying to understand the complexity of different people's conceptions of their worlds. This, however, begs the question of whether multiple methods enable the research participants to provide all of the necessary information or if they are simply subsidiary options for data collection. I found, through this research, that the use of multiple methods increases the opportunities to obtain richer, deeper data and offers various channels to obtain different, yet complementary, information about the research subject (Thomas, 2011).

Timeframe and contextual issues, such as access to respondents and the case study locations, influenced the sequence of the methods used. Due to its proximity to my own location, the *Bekaa and Irbid* fieldwork started prior to *Dhaka*. Moreover, as my first access to the research participants was with the children and young people, I began with the focus group method. I then had the opportunity to meet the adult respondents where I employed semi-structured interviews to collect information. Observation and documentary review were used concurrently during both the focus groups and interviews.

Furthermore, these four methods informed each other throughout the research, from data collection to analysis. For instance, some of the child participants' responses during the focus groups were included and analysed further in interviews with the adult facilitators in order to explore issues that had not been

considered during the creation of the initial interview schedule. One such example that arose was the anonymity aspect of the research, which created tension as the young researchers wanted to be recognised for their efforts. Similarly, another example was when observations led to an investigation of power dynamics amongst the child participants. This was not included in the original schedule, but was added to future focus groups and interviews once this concern became evident. Likewise, some of the participants' responses also prompted observations in order to understand or clarify the information they provided. One example was when child participants stated that there were no differences between the boys' and girls' roles in their project, but other sources indicated that the opposite was true. Observations helped me to explore this issue from a different lens, not just from the children's account. Overall, the interconnectedness of these methods made the data collection process and analysis more dynamic.

In regards to the connection between the methods and the research questions, Mason (2006) argues that in order to carry out a rigorous enquiry the research questions must match appropriate design and selected methods. As such, the relationship between the research questions and methods underpins the projects' foundation and ensures its quality (O'Sullivan, 2004). I used an adapted version of the crosswalk table (*ibid*), to identify connections between my research questions and chosen methods. In the following sections, I discuss how each of these chosen methods contributed to respond the research questions and how these techniques were used during the data collection stage.

**Table 5 Research questions and methods crosswalk table**

Research questions	Focus Group	Semi-structured interviews	Observation	Documentary review
What are children and young people’s motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research as a way to influence decision-making?	X	X	X	X
What are the processes of child-led research that positively or negatively influence decision-making?	X	X		X
In what ways does child-led research influence decision-making? (And why and how do they do so?)	X	X		X

### 3.6.1 Focus groups

Focus groups are a method of collecting qualitative data, which usually “involve engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), ‘focused’ around a particular topic or set of issues” (Wilkinson, 2011, p168). They were first used during World War II to study military morale; afterwards they were used as a data collection technique in market research and in the 1990s, it became a popularly used research method across many disciplines (Yin, 2014). However, focus groups have been widely used as a method of choice in social research when the

research objective is primarily to explore participants' beliefs, views and opinions (Wilkinson, 2011). This collective interview bases the discussion around a series of questions in order to engage the participants fully by interacting with the other participants and the researcher (Smithson, 2000).

While this information can also be gathered using other research methods, such as individual interviews or direct observation, the richness of a focus group is the interaction that occurs amongst the research participants, producing valuable data (Morgan, 2012). Morgan also argues that the conversational dynamics of focus groups, which are moderated by researchers, generates substantive content around the questions posed by the researcher and also allows the participants to set their own agenda by moving the discussion in different directions according to their interests and knowledge. However, Finch and Lewis (2003) argue that this collective participation raises some critical concerns around the power dynamics amongst group participants, which may affect the efficacy of this method. For instance, some participants tend to dominate the conversation and impose their ideas on the group. The recognition of this limitation must be an important component of the reflexivity process and measures should be made to minimise this risk.

Due to the nature of this research project, I decided to use focus groups as a data collection method to answer the research questions as most of the participants were children and young people, and this conversational technique facilitates interactions amongst research participants, particularly young people, as it allows them to say what they think and feel motivated to express their perspectives while interacting with peers in a familiar setting (e.g. Krueger and Casey, 2009; Scott, 2000).

In the same vein, Gallagher (2009) indicates that focus groups are a convenient method to collect the opinions and experiences of particular groups of children and young people as they can engage in an active dialogue, which generates a negotiation between the individual and collective views of the participants. I did not use focus groups with the adult interviewees as they were based in different locations. It was not feasible to bring them together for one collective conversation, so they participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

As Morgan (2012) points out, the inherent interactive component of focus groups implies a connection between what participants say and the conversation dynamic amongst those who actively engage. This requires stimulating individuals to participate in the discussion. In order to facilitate these conversations with the children and young people in this research, I developed an interview schedule with main, prompt and follow-up questions (see Appendix D). This interview schedule, plus my facilitation skills, enabled a process in which the participants actively participated and constructed knowledge through direct interactions with one another. This was possible through the use of visual techniques, such as photographs and other interactive tools, which made the setting more relaxed and dynamic and helped them focus on the themes at hand (Clark et al., 2003). These tools and techniques will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Burke (2005) points out that focus groups also allow for the possibility of including games and creative activities in order to provide a more familiar environment for children and young people and make the session more comfortable and approachable. However, it is important to clarify that the inclusion of creative,

fun or stimulating activities does not imply that the children and young people were unable to understand and engage in the focus group, but instead it helped them to feel more comfortable with the researcher and encouraged their participation (Punch, 2002). Inevitably, as with many other methods, focus groups bring some challenges, such as the necessity for one time and location for respondents to join the group (Bryman, 2008). These concerns were minimised by conducting the focus groups in community centres close to where the children and young people lived and the time allocated was scheduled around their needs (e.g. school, recreation and other activities). Furthermore, I ensured that the spaces and settings of the interviews were sensitive to children and young people, so they would feel as though they were in a space where they could express their ideas and opinions (Scott, 2000). Participants reported that they felt comfortable and valued and free to express their ideas during the focus groups.

#### **3.6.1.1 Before the focus group**

Regarding meeting logistics, I coordinated with my point person on local transportation, refreshments and stationery materials needed and in both case studies, I visited the venues in advance in order to check that the room was suitable for focus groups and gave directions on how the spaces should be set up to meet the activities' needs. To the maximum extent practical, I ensured that the setting was child-friendly and welcoming; chairs were arranged in a circle and two flipchart easels were used to take notes during the sessions. I purposely conducted the sessions in



neutral spaces that were not associated with the gatekeeper's offices in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality and make the participants feel able to express their opinions freely (Grinnell and Unrau, 2011). Furthermore, it was agreed that the gatekeeper's staff members would sit outside of the rooms during the focus groups to ensure that child participants felt comfortable expressing their views on the research they carried out. In order to decrease the burden on the participants in terms of time allocated to participate in this research project, focus groups were conducted during the dates and times suggested by the children and young people in order to ensure that they were able to participate without compromising their school or housework responsibilities.

I also liaised with the gatekeeper to identify any specific needs of the child participants or sensitive issues of which I should be aware (e.g. gender sensitivities, religious considerations, local dialects, and dress code). This information helped me to adapt the settings, methods and techniques where needed. For instance, in the case of the Syrian children, a standard greeting amongst males was three kisses on their cheeks, but girls were not allowed to kiss or shake hands with any males. Girls expected me to put my hand on my chest and bow my head as a respectful greeting. These practices resonate with James and James' (2012) argument that the understanding of childhood and children and young people's interactions vary between different countries and cultures, and relationships are negotiated and constructed by the peoples' interactions in specific times and contexts. Prout (2011) also points out that social relationships are diverse and fragmented; thus, they are locally constructed through the exchanges of members of a social group.

Regarding issues of security and safety, I revisited the initial risk assessment in order to make an informed decision regarding safety and security prior to travelling to the sites. Williamson and Burns (2014) argue that researchers are responsible for taking reasonable precautions to avoid perceived risks and must put strategies in place to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills for effectively coping with emotionally distressing situations or physical harm. I was exposed to some potential risks during the course of this study as political instability increased at both case studies field sites. I believe, however, these risks were minimised through my engagement with the gatekeeper, which helped in that I did not have to deal with these security challenges in isolation. Additionally, my 25 years of experience of working in international development programmes, specifically within major humanitarian disasters, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami, the war in Lebanon and the Haiti earthquake, has equipped me with tools and knowledge to manage these security threats in a more experienced way. Some frequent risks to safety include the risk of physical threat or abuse, psychological trauma, becoming the subject of accusations of improper behaviour as well as everyday risks, such as traffic accidents or illness (Economic and Social Research Council, 2015). One unexpected risk occurred upon my arrival at the Dhaka airport where I was not allowed to enter the country because I had been issued the wrong visa. After being detained for eight hours, I was deported. I then flew to Singapore where World Vision supported me. We revisited the initial risk assessment that did not indicate that visas were a risk factor, but scenarios change rapidly when internal political crises come into play. In this situation, more restrictions were being imposed at the borders.

The Social Research Association (2003) points out that risk is a part of everyday life, but there is an obligation to anticipate the risks and ensure the protection of the research team. One strategy to diminish danger is to maintain an ongoing awareness of the risks and reassess the situation according to any changes in context. When this situation arose in Bangladesh, I utilised this approach in coordination with the gatekeeper. We revisited the country regulations for foreigners and reapplied for a visa. World Vision also had a staff member waiting at the airport upon my arrival to mitigate any issues should they arise. This proved to be a fortuitous decision because during my second attempt to enter the country, border agents detained me again, this time for four hours. However, due to our risk planning, the World Vision staff member was able to secure my entry into the country.

In Lebanon and Jordan, I also faced some challenges regarding safety and security. For instance, when I was visiting a refugee camp a focus group was organised in Jordan at the same time that there were heavily armed clashes between ISIS militants and the Jordanian army. I was on my way to Irbid to meet the children and young people with my interpreter and driver when the gatekeeper's security officer called and cancelled the visit and demanded we return to Amman immediately. During the following days, I assessed the situation and the focus groups were rescheduled once the tensions decreased. In another example of security concerns affecting this project, this time in Lebanon, focus group sessions were cancelled several times as the children and young people lived in one of the areas most affected by political instability. Also, in Bangladesh, some focus groups were relocated to a

venue closer to where the children and young people lived to avoid their need to commute long distances as the county was facing anti-government demonstrations and rallies at that time. I also liaised throughout the project with the gatekeeper's security officers to assess my own safety. The gatekeeper provided me with a list of measures to minimise risks during the course of my fieldwork, including a selection of safe hotels in which I could stay and clear information about curfews and areas of the city that I could and could not visit. The gatekeeper also assigned me a driver and vehicle to commute safely. In Appendix K, there are photographs that illustrate the environments where the fieldwork took place.

### **3.6.1.2 During the focus group**

As participants arrived for the focus groups, I invited them into the room, distributed name badges and served refreshments. I also used this time to build connections with them by asking questions about their schools, communities and favourite games. As mentioned in the reflexivity section, I was aware that I needed to minimise power issues, as participants could perceive me as an adult with some level of authority. This could jeopardise the outcomes of the focus groups, which is why I dedicated time to warming up and building a rapport with the young interviewees. Once settled, I started the sessions by welcoming participants and introducing myself in more detail. I also introduced the interpreter and explained his role in the meetings. I then invited everyone to introduce himself or herself by using an icebreaker to help create a relaxing atmosphere (Appendix E). Once the icebreaker

finished, I explained to the participants more about this research project, including the primary objectives of these meetings, the process they would go through and how the data would be used. I distributed information sheets in the local languages as many children and young people preferred to read what was being told to them in order to understand the information provided. I outlined the confidentiality component and its exceptions and reinforced that participants had the right to opt out at any point during the focus group sessions. I then asked participants to submit their consent forms signed by themselves and their parents.

I shared a set of “joint rules” with the participants, which were developed by other children and young people in previous group activities. I asked if they would like to keep, remove or add to any of these rules (Appendix F). After the joint rules were agreed upon, I gave participants time to ask questions to resolve any doubts about the research project in general or that session in particular. In both case studies, the children and young people’s questions were around how the information gathered would be used, how they could have access to the final findings report and why they were invited to participate. These were not surprising questions for me as I noticed that these children and young people had a lot of experience with similar projects as they had previously been invited to participate in several other research studies and evaluations.

Once the introductory part was over, I started the main sessions using visual materials and participatory techniques to make the conversations more interesting (Punch, 2002), using a “road map” tool (See Appendix E) to stimulate the discussions. Participants in the two case studies were very friendly and kind but were a bit shy at

the beginning; however, after the icebreakers and road map exercises, they were more relaxed and willing to speak openly. The “road map” tool is a board game illustrating the young researchers’ journeys through their child-led research projects to help participants remember earlier activities. Participants received a set of photographs that were taken during the child-led research, which documented the different activities the young researched conducted. Each participant placed a photo on the game board in the order that the events occurred and explained what happened and when. This tool helped participants rebuild collective memories of the events, debate the chronological order and describe the events, which in many cases were slightly different to what they remembered. At the end of the game, the group agreed upon what happened and the timelines in which they occurred. These activities were also very useful to give me a complete picture of the child-led research processes in one format. Following the road map activity, I invited the participants to sit in the circle of chairs where I introduced the focus group questions (Appendix D). The schedule was structured around nine core questions within four thematic sections:

1. Motivations, eagerness and abilities of children and young people to engage in child-led research.
2. Views and perceptions regarding the processes of their participation in the child-led research.
3. Views and perceptions regarding the outcomes of their participation in the child-led research.
4. Their reflections on their personal experiences.

As indicated earlier, my research position was that children and young people are competent social actors with the ability to participate in decision-making processes and develop their own views and opinions within specific contexts. Therefore, they were treated as such during the focus groups, giving them space to contribute their viewpoints and first-hand experiences in response to my questions. The focus groups were conducted in a conversational style where they felt free to answer, argue or clarify the enquiries. However, when I noticed that the questions were difficult to understand, I rephrased, explaining them using other terms. I also used prompts to gain more precise answers and obtain in-depth responses. I made efforts to provide all participants with enough time and space to express their views.

After we finished the first set of questions, I asked the children and young people to take a break, after which we restarted the new session with a “collaging ideas” activity (Appendix E). This game aimed to stimulate their ideas and express their experiences in answer to the second set of questions. After the collaging activity, I carried on with the second set of questions. As with the first set, I invited participants to answer the questions and gave enough time to respond. During the conversations, I assessed the groups’ dynamics in order to evaluate if more games or activities were needed. Sometimes, when I noticed that participants were tired, I stopped the sessions to give them time to rest and have fun. Once the focus groups were over, I summarised the main issues, explained the next steps and discussed how I would use the information collected. I thanked the participants and acknowledged their valuable contributions, closing the sessions with refreshments to celebrate the end of the activities.

### 3.6.1.3 Reflection on the power dynamics during focus groups

As Finch and Lewis (2003) argue, power issues are a potential threat to focus groups. These issues emerged in my research project too and were addressed by using techniques to break down the power dynamics to ensure all participants had an equal opportunity to express their ideas and ensure no one undermined other people's views (O'Kane, 2008). Despite the utilisation of those techniques, power dynamics always exist. For instance, in two of the seven focus groups conducted, some young respondents (girls and boys) tried to dominate by talking loudly, using long answers and undermining others in order to prevent them from giving their opinions. To mitigate the impact of these power dynamics on the groups, I used several techniques to ease the situations and reduce distracting influences of these participants where possible, including warming-up exercises, games and distributions of tasks (Krueger and Casey, 2009). For example, I managed to reduce the tensions and turned these antagonistic behaviours into positive contributions by giving the more dominant participants tasks to perform. On one occasion, I asked a young participant to help me distribute materials and write key ideas from the focus group on the "parking lot" flipchart, which was very effective in lessening the power issues.

In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, the children and young people from Lebanon were very active and contributed to the discussion with good analysis and detailed information. Age and gender were factors that had an impact on the



conversations as the older young people and males were more dominant and tried to take control of the discussions. There were no evident religious issues displayed in these conversations, but one adult facilitator mentioned that when Christian children participated in activities they tended to dominate and patronise the Muslim children and young people, especially if they were refugees.

As discussed elsewhere, these power issues within the focus groups could be treated as limitations for the use of this method, but they could also be considered as a problem to be resolved with effective facilitation (Smithson, 2000). I took into account both perspectives. On one hand I managed these power dynamics as a problem based on traditional power issues and used my moderator skills to successfully address them; I did not challenge participants' mindsets, but instead I set out protocols for interactions and equal opportunities for everyone to contribute to the debates. On the other hand, I included these issues as potential limitations of the data and included further analysis in the findings chapter.

In Jordan, the group dynamics were good. Nobody dominated the conversations and everybody participated. However, gender issues appeared often during the sessions; for instance, girls sat together at one side of the room and boys the other. As a result they had minimal interaction and avoided any direct contact with each other. Girls were outspoken, but I noticed that they often let the boys speak first, even though the girls' contributions were more pertinent and in-depth. The group was homogenous in terms of age, education and ethnicity; however, as gender had the most impact on the group dynamics which designated specific roles for them, I minimised the impact of this issue by balancing the questions between

the boys and girls and giving equal opportunities for all to respond. I reduced the dominant opinions by asking for collective agreement on some issues where the boys and girls had divergent views. Participants were also less articulate than their peers in Lebanon, and I had the impression that this group was less knowledgeable and less interested in the project. This may be attributed to the fact that their project had ended two years prior to these meetings and the children and young people never met once their research concluded. This was a noteworthy difference with the group in Lebanon who met several times after the project ended and remained well connected.

In the *Dhaka* case study, the children and young people were very articulate, well prepared and presented their views emphatically. In this group session, in contrast to the focus groups in Jordan, girls were more active than the boys and made their views more strongly when discussing the issues around their participation in the project. One of the issues that generated some tensions amongst participants was that some of them spoke English very well and they were able to answer the questions in English. This created a gap between the participants who did and did not speak English; those who could not were unable to participate in the dialogue as fully. When this situation arose, I asked the participants to speak only in Bengali, so everyone could understand and participate equally. The English-speaking children were unhappy but complied. This situation brought to light a power dilemma that researchers might have over participants when it comes to research decisions. As Preston-Shoot and colleagues (2008) argue, researchers may be confronted with making decisions with ethical implications; for instance, in this case when I wanted

to create a non-hierarchical setting I made an executive decision to ensure equal participation opportunities for all children and young people. Preston-Shoot and colleagues point out that the approach to this type of ethical negotiations needs to be in terms of pragmatism, balancing the costs and benefits and looking for a preferred orientation rather than a strict framework.

### **3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The second method utilised in this research project was semi-structure interviews, which were employed with the participating adults. Holstein and Gubrium (2011) define an interview as “an actively constructed conversation through which narrative data were produced” (p149). Mason (2002) points out that a semi-structured interview is characterised by its informal style, in which the researcher and interviewee engage in a conversation or discussion rather than a formal question and answer session. Potter and Hepburn (2012) argue that interviews, from very formal to more informal styles, have been embraced by social research, especially in sociology, social psychology, geography and anthropology, as this method has been effective for eliciting information from research participants. In the same vein, Beitin (2012) states that interviews are an opportunity to bring individuals with a deep knowledge of a phenomenon or experience into the research to provide their own perspectives. This rich information is shared with the researcher in an interactional dialogue, where both the interviewer and interviewee actively engage and construct meaning from the interaction (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Although there is a general recognition that individual interviews contribute to in-depth data, this

method also has some limitations and weaknesses, such as a tendency for response bias, the time consuming nature of the data collection and the possibility for inaccuracies within the data due to poor recall or poorly developed questions (e.g. Beitin, 2012; Potter and Hepburn, 2012; Yin, 2014). These constraints are however compensated by the many benefits of interviewing, as it:

- Provides opportunities to generate rich data and explore topics in depth (Mason, 2002)
- Facilitates an interactive dialogue where questions and answers can open new topics and information can become more descriptive and detailed (Rubin and Ruben, 2005)
- Allows respondents to express and articulate perceptions, values, feelings and understandings, including their own experiences and stories (Potter and Hepburn, 2012)
- Facilitates the construction and reconstruction of knowledge as a result of the interactions between researchers and interviewees (Mason, 2002)

Based on the characteristics above and the nature of my research project, interviewing was considered an appropriate method to facilitate an interactive dialogue amongst the adult participants and researcher in order to explore relevant themes in a descriptive and detailed manner (Rubin and Ruben, 2005). I chose to conduct interviews because of my ontological and epistemological positions that suggest that people's knowledge and experiences are meaningful components of the social reality that my research project was exploring, and interviews are a legitimate way to generate data by gaining access to the accounts and articulations of research participants (Mason, 2002).

As already mentioned, the children and young people participated in focus groups and adult respondents contributed their feedback in semi-structured

interviews as this method was more appropriate to their availability and how they felt most comfortable responding. I asked adult participants if they preferred individual interviews or focus group sessions, and all requested individual interviews as their preferred method. I interviewed 14 adult participants: eight in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study and six in the *Dhaka* case study. Children and young people were offered the same choice of participation in focus groups and interviews. Their preferred option was focus groups as they said they feel more comfortable to be with their peers.

The use of semi-structured interviews was a valuable method for me to gain in-depth knowledge from the participants on their attitudes, perceptions and experiences regarding their involvement in the collective child-led research projects and provided me an opportunity to pay closer attention to the individual characteristics of the respondents (Gallagher, 2009). Additionally, this method enabled me to focus on the specific topics I wanted to cover in the interviews and situated the information in particular contexts where the research was conducted (Mason, 2002). The semi-structured interview was preferred over open or structured interviews because while it offered a format, it was less rigid and conducted more conversationally (Robin et al., 2009). This greater degree of flexibility was useful in adapting the order of the questions according to the natural direction in which respondents took the interviews and reassess the focus of the conversations based on the interactions between myself, as the researcher, and the interviewees (Beitin, 2012).

My initial preference was to conduct face-to-face interviews, as they give the opportunity to observe the individual mannerisms of participants first hand, rather than virtual interviews (Gallagher, 2009). However, I was confronted with certain limitations as some of the participants were based in different cities and countries, making it necessary to interview them using online platforms (e.g. Skype and WebEx). Six interviews were conducted in person and eight took place virtually.

I designed an interview schedule to explore the key issues around the study topic and unpacked the research questions into specific queries in order to make the interviews more conversational and relaxed (Rubin and Ruben, 2005). The interviewees were chosen from a list of staff members who were involved in different stages of the child-led research projects, based on their interactions and experiences with the children and young people. In order to recruit them, I contacted each staff member personally and via email with an invitation to participate in the research project and an information leaflet (Appendix A). From an initial list of 16, 14 agreed to be interviewed and two were not found as they had moved on to other organisations and countries.

All interviews were conducted in English as all participants had a good command of the language. I began each interview with a brief explanation of the research topic, an overview of the information leaflet they received and allocated some time for questions; however, there were no significant queries as the information leaflet covered all key points. I also asked them to submit a signed consent form (Appendix B). While asking the questions, I ensured that the session was comfortable and stimulating by building a rapport with the participants and

using an informal conversational style (Grinnell and Unrau, 2011). In some cases, I adapted the sequence of questions and used prompts in order to carry out the interview as efficiently as possible.

In general, the interviews were conducted in a very relaxed environment and participants were confident in their answers. However, some staff members had strong personalities and tried to control the conversations by changing the topics to one in which they were more interested, such as their advocacy strategies rather than the children and young people's experiences. I believe this was mostly due to their level of seniority within their offices and their specific thematic portfolios. This situation did not affect the interviews as I managed to take control and refocus the conversations by using prompts and follow-up questions. In some interviews, when I asked detailed questions that required more analysis or knowledge, the participants felt overwhelmed or a bit uncomfortable, which indicated that I needed to be careful about how people are feeling before I try to go deeper on a subject. I noticed that some levels of anxiety occurred when I started asking more challenging questions; for instance, "how do you define child-led research", "what does the term 'research' mean", "why this type of participation and not another".

Participants in the research knew the concepts covered by the questions, but they were not able to provide detailed definitions, which caused them some stress. Additionally, some staff members stated that they needed more time to develop a definition and said that they should have been given advance notice of the questions to be asked, so they could have come prepared with an answer. This raised the recurrent issue of whether questionnaires should be sent to interviewees in advance,

begging the question of which is better: a well-developed answer prepared in advance or a spontaneous one? I believe that an unprompted answer is a better option as the conversation during the interview is more dynamic and the dialogue between the interviewee and interviewer generates good knowledge and constructs joint meanings. However, I was aware that people do not like being assessed, so I changed the emphasis of the questions and reassured them that I recognised that they were experts on their subject matters and was impressed by their level of knowledge and experience. All of the interviews ended very well, and many of the participants thanked me because the questions helped them to reflect more on their projects and the experiences of the young researchers.

### **3.6.3 Documentary analysis**

Documentary analysis is a method of gathering additional information in order to describe the opinions, values and beliefs of participants based on material they have produced (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). For Atkison and Coffey (2011), documents are social facts that are developed, shared and used in a socially organised way. These documents are one way that organisations or people can represent themselves collectively and construct their identities. Yin (2014) argues that documentary review is a key source of evidence that can be used in case studies as it helps “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p107). These documents can be letters, diaries, meeting minutes, project proposals, evaluations or articles in newspapers or on social media.



Atkison and Coffey (2011) point out that the systematic review of material produced by organisations is critical to explore their self-representation, and the values attached to the documents reveal how they want to be perceived by others and how they construct meaning. Stake (2003) states that the review of documentary material has an explicit role in investigating a case study as the documents provide information to understand the complexities of a social phenomenon and how these issues are situated and related to the group members. However, as Yin (2014) argues, documentary review does not contain the absolute truth as these documents have been produced with specific purposes and audiences in mind, so they need to be interpreted alongside the other sources of evidence. Additional weaknesses of this method include the difficulty of finding relevant documents, a potential bias in the selection of documents and an overabundance of sources (Freeman and Maybin, 2011).

Reflecting upon this literature, I included documentary review as a method to supplement the information I obtained from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews. I collected internal reports, social media posts and visual materials produced by the children and young people and the gatekeeper in order to explore their views and positions and the way they represented themselves. As Freeman and Maybin (2011) argue, the “document is an expression of agency on the part of its author, and the message it carries is important according to the decisions or views it records and the actions it determines” (p158).

The children and young people from the *Dhaka* and *Bekaa and Irbid* case studies produced a good number of documents that reflected their activities and the

outcomes of their work, including blogs, letters, press releases, reports, photo-advocacy booklets, videos and informal publications. Such documentary evidence was useful in addressing the research questions by identifying the positions, values and contexts where participants operated (Bowen, 2009). Documentary analysis within this research project was a valuable method that substantiated and supplemented evidence from other sources and provided details that were not obtained in either the focus groups or interviews (Burns, 2000). For instance, while reviewing the videos that the children and young people produced in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study to promote and disseminate their findings, I found new, rich information that reflected their opinions and emotions as the process was unfolding that was not evident in the focus group or interview data. Documentary review was useful for looking at relationships and processes within the case studies, and it supported the understanding of what happened in the subject study (Thomas, 2011). Document data were included during the analysis phase and had an impact on the focus groups and interviews. For instance, while interviewing the research participants, my earlier review of relevant documents gave me a familiarity with the case studies and helped me see another dimension of the issues. This enabled me to delve deeper and ask for further clarification from participants. I contrasted information from various resources, particularly blogs and social media, with data from the other methods employed, which allowed me to provide a more accurate description of participants' views and positions.

To ensure a systematic search for all relevant documents, I used two means of collection: by requesting documents from the gatekeeper and the children and

young people and by searching the internet. I collected brochures, leaflets, blogs, videos, TV interviews, newspaper articles, news from websites, project design documents, project reports and lessons learnt documents (Appendixes J and I). All of these sources provided more information about the way that the children and young people and gatekeeper perceived their projects and how these experiences were communicated to external audiences. For instance, I reviewed the media coverage in order to analyse how the child-led research was featured in different media outlets, how child researchers expressed their ideas and how the reporters understood the processes carried out by the young researchers.

#### **3.6.4 Participant observation**

Participant observation was another supplementary method of data generation selected for this research. Silverman (2011) describes two types of observations within research strategies: non-participant and participant. The former occurs when the researcher externally observes without interacting with the subjects or research in order to observe and document the situation as naturally as possible, implying that the researcher does nothing to influence, control or intervene in the behaviour of those under observation (Gomm, 2008). Participant observation takes place when researchers take part in the actions they are observing and establish direct relationships with the subjects studied (Li, 2008). Silverman (2011) describes the key features of participant observation by the researcher as:

- Establishing a direct relationship with the social actors

- Staying in their natural environment with the purpose of observing and describing the social actors
- Interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonial and rituals
- Learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions (p17)

Silverman notes that observation can be undertaken in several ways and with differing levels of researcher involvement between the two extremes of participant and non-participant. In respect to this typology of possible observer roles, I positioned myself as a participant observer as I was fully involved in the interactions with the research participants in the two case studies. As part of my fieldwork, I spent many weeks visiting them in the places where they met and socialised, established relationships and exchanged views about their experiences and lives. The number of children and young people I met each day varies from two to 18, depending on the activities they participated in. As I became a regular visitor, my presence was always noted and accepted as something normal. These everyday interactions provided me with opportunities to view rich representations of participants' contextualised social realities. However, Li (2008) argues that having these close interactions as a researcher may benefit the research, but also invites controversy and debate on ethical issues, such as deception and absence of informed consent from the people being studied. I addressed this issue in my project by explaining to the research participants that I would take notes during my observations as one of my research methods and asked for their approval, which was consented and documented. I collected notes from activities and spaces in which participants met and mingled, such as the community centres, outdoor patios, offices and meeting rooms. In all of

these spaces, I made my status as a researcher explicit whilst observing. Furthermore, notes were only taken during activities that related to my research and on the people who consented to be part of the project.

The decision to use participant observation was, as Silverman (2006) argues, a useful method to spend more time with the research participants in order to understand their social realities by observing from the inside and from a distance. As the PhD project was retrospective, observations were undertaken *after* and not during the child-led research projects conducted by the young researchers. Observations for the PhD project thus explored the environments where the projects had been carried out and the relationships between the young researchers and adult facilitators, and amongst the young researchers themselves. As I did not have prior involvement with the research participants, observation was a useful technique to delve into the nature of their relationships, the issues of power and the ways they resolve tensions and problems. For instance, young researchers stated in focus groups that they did not experience any gender-specific obstacles to their participation; however, data from observation showed that their relationships were less equal than they thought they were. This resonates with Davis (2011) who argues that a rigorous qualitative approach requires researchers to actively observe children and young people over a significant lapse of time, including diversity of context and time, in order to explore the intersection between their actions and the social environments where they live. The fact that I was onsite doing fieldwork immediately inserted me into the case studies' investigations and provided me the chance to observe the interactions, relationships and contexts first hand and rich opportunities

to get habituated and adapted to the research settings before beginning interviews and focus groups, which are considered more intrusive methods (Richards, 2015). For example, my preliminary observations during my first site visits were documented and included in the reviews of my interview schedules and the interaction methods I used with the research participants.

It was critical as a researcher to decide how to observe and record notes and what observations to focus on in my notes. Walford (2009) points out that one of the most demanding aspects of fieldwork is the need to write down observations and then expand those field notes into a more developed structure to be used during data analysis. I followed Walford's (2009) recommendations that say to record as much relevant information as possible, ensure events that are different or unexpected are recorded and take notes with the thought that they could be used in the analyses and writing processes later. In order to give a solid structure to my field notes, I initially divided them into three columns as recommended by Lofland (2006): the first column included a description of the events, participants and places; the second noted ideas or interferences; and the last dictated my impressions and feelings. I then decided to add a fourth column to include comments and questions in brackets as suggested by Walford (2009). Documenting the field notes was a crucial process for my reflexivity during my fieldwork, as the memory would be weak and unreliable. These notes were then combined, compared and constructed with the notes taken from interviews and focus groups. The next section discusses my processes for recording and transcription.

### 3.6.5 Recording and transcription

The focus groups and interviews were all recorded with the authorisation of every participant. The use of a voice recorder was critical in order for me to fully capture the content from the interviews and focus groups. This allowed for conversations to be reviewed several times to ensure no details were omitted, reduced the subjectivity of memory and avoided imperfect reporting based on recollections (Grinnell and Unrau, 2011). Such an approach also facilitated the transcriptions and reviews of the interpretations as needed (Pitchforth and van Teijlingen, 2005). I planned to take handwritten notes in case permissions were not granted or the use of a voice recorder was impracticable; however, this proved to be unnecessary. During the conversations with interviewees, I regularly assessed if they felt distracted or challenged by the recording. The participants mentioned that while the recording was not an issue for them, some were preoccupied with my note taking and wanted to know what I was writing. In those instances, I stopped writing and relied solely on the recording in order to not distract the interviewees.

Voice recordings were transcribed to written format in order to document what participants said and who contributed what during the interviews and focus groups (Kvale, 1996). I also added to the transcriptions the dynamics of the conversation, emotions, feelings and nuances of the languages (Bryman, 2008). In order to facilitate identification of the respondents during the transcriptions, especially for focus groups, I used a mapping technique to layout where participants sat, their names and the colour of their clothes and then wrote the order of

contributions in my notes. In some cases, I thanked participants by name following their responses in order to identify them during the transcription process. When any issues were detected, such as grammatical inconsistencies, repetitions and intonations, the recordings were reviewed and compared with the notes in order to verify any missing information. All transcripts had a unique identifier, which included the method, place and date (e.g. Focusgroup-Dhaka-10.08.2016). The transcripts were consistently laid out with a header that included the details of the interviews or focus groups, (i.e. dates, places, times, interviewees' and interpreters' names, and brief descriptions of the interviewees (genders, roles, locations where based and children and young peoples' ages). Transcripts also included the use of pseudonyms as other identifiers were removed in order to ensure anonymity of the respondents' personal information. The children and young people helped to pick the pseudonyms, which was a bit difficult as some of the names were more popular than others, but consensus was reached on that point.

### **3.6.6 Language and interpretation**

In conducting this research, particular attention was paid to languages as the data from the children and young peoples' focus groups were collected in Arabic in Lebanon and Jordan and Bengali in Bangladesh, then translated and reported in English (see also Pitchforth and van Teijlingen, 2005). In order to ensure that all participants felt confident to express their ideas fully in their own language, an interpreter was provided to ensure participants and I had a meaningful dialogue (Squires, 2009). The interpreters performed consecutive interpreting, which meant



that they sat next to me and translated what the participant said, at the end of each sentence or complete idea, into English. When I asked questions in English the interpreters translated them into the local language in a similar fashion.

Interpreter recruitment was conducted in Beirut, Lebanon and Dhaka, Bangladesh and several resumes were screened. The primary requirement was a proven track record of interpreting in a professional research environment; however, I also included several other prerequisites, such as: being able to interact and communicate effectively with children and young people; being respectful of child protection standards; having prior experience interpreting for research projects that involved children and young people; and displaying cultural, gender, religious, ethnicity and age sensitivities. As an additional requirement, the interpreters had to agree to abide by the confidentiality codes in qualitative research. I interviewed the top two applicants at each site and made an offer to the best candidate respectively.

Once the interpreters were hired, I met with them in order to explain the purpose of the research project and the interpretation methodology. I mainly focused on the two critical issues that Murray and Wynne (2001) highlight: a) the differences between our roles as researchers and interpreters, and b) the ethical and cultural considerations outlined in the research project. I was aware of the potential concerns that could occur in the relationships between the interpreters, participants and me and took this under consideration during my reflective practice (Pitchforth and van Teijlingen, 2005). For example, I asked myself 'what are the particular challenges of working through an interpreter given the age group of participants?' These matters were addressed in the selection of the interpreters and in the

preparatory phase. Further, I repeatedly assessed the situations during each focus group to evaluate the impact the interpreter had on the children and young people's responses, but no major issues were identified. I also recognised the limitations of interpretation. For instance the process of selective translation can be complex, as the interpreter needs to make decisions on what to interpret and how to do it while keeping specific meanings intact (Wolff-Michael, 2013). The trustworthiness of the interpretations was based on the interpreters' strong command of their local languages and English. However, there were some exceptional instances of untranslatability, where the interpreters used interpretation procedures to compensate and provided word combinations that conveyed the phrases' closest meanings in English (Temple and Edwards, 2002). These situations happened when interviewees addressed specific concepts with local religious or traditional expressions or culturally driven metaphors; thus, these terms had a different meaning or did not make any sense in English (Al-Amer et al., 2016). This was resolved by keeping a record of the original expressions after they were interpreted to the closest meaning in English.

As Murray and Wynne (2001) mention, the decision to employ a knowledgeable and sensitive interpreter generates several benefits to research, such as contributing to a better understanding of the local culture and values; it also helped me to adapt to the local standards of styles and manners. Both interpreters in the *Dhaka* and *Bekaa and Irbid* case studies were helpful in guiding me on the local customs while interacting with the young participants and understanding the volatile and unstable site environments.

### 3.7 Process of data analysis

Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence to produce empirical based findings (Yin, 2014, p132). As this research project used a multiple case study approach, the focus of the analysis was three-fold: the phenomenon of which the case was the example, the nature of differences between the cases and the interconnection between the emerging themes (Thomas, 2011). The data generated from focus groups, interviews, documents and observation were examined using thematic analysis, which is a procedure of analysis that examines and records themes or patterns within the data that are associated to a phenomenon and to specific research questions (Guest et al., 2012). This type of analysis has been selected as a flexible technique that enables the researcher to identify and categorise the emerging themes from the data and to gain understanding of the information gathered (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Broadly, thematic analysis comprised of multiple phases to establish solid patterns, such as familiarisation with data, creation of initial codes, exploring themes amongst codes, reshaping themes, defining themes and writing up the findings (Saldana, 2009). Building on these stages and whilst working with the data, I used a technique recommended by Richards (2015) that consists of five steps:

1. Take a first review of the data documents and read. Skim read, then start again, and read the text very thoroughly, line by line.
2. Record (on paper or on the computer) anything interesting about any of the text.

3. When you find yourself saying something is interesting, ask 'Why is it interesting?' and record your answer.
4. Focus on any passages that are especially interesting and play with them, to open them out and find what they are about. Compare with other situations where this might happen.
5. Ask 'Why am I interested in that?' and record your answer (p89).

This technique was very helpful for me to move from a descriptive process to one that was more conceptual and analytical. For instance, I took annotations of my thoughts about sections that I considered relevant or enlightening. These notes were connected to ideas, phrases or words that I highlighted in the transcripts. In certain cases, I wrote more detailed pieces of writing on emerging themes that I stored and reviewed later while analysing the data and writing the findings chapter. Richards (2015) points out that these notes or memos are critical to develop the research project into a more elaborated and complex set of ideas and concepts. I also connected all information collected with clear linkages between the sources of evidence. For instance, I inserted notes where I highlighted specific information from an interview which was connected to observations, document review, field notes or to the literature.

After reading the data intensely and deeply, I organised the data systematically into themes, categories and codes (Silverman, 2006). Vaismoradi and colleagues (2013) describe codes as the basic labels attached to a phrase or idea (for instance in this study facilitator is a 'code' for the adults who interacted with and supported the children and young people). A category, is created by assembling several codes within a similar classification into a collection (for instance, the

professionals whose characteristics included relationship and trust codes, were grouped together as facilitators). Braun and Clarke (2006) classify themes as the higher-level of categorisation developed to identify main components within the data (for instance, the challenging interactions between adults and children and young people).

As Richards (2015) argues, the thematic analysis process requires seeing across the data and above individual sources of evidence to gather information under specific topics. In order to identify the emerging themes, I first looked at each case study as an independent unit and then looked at both case studies together to examine them comparatively (Saldana, 2009). I kept a link with the type of informant and the method, throughout the analysis, in order to ensure that different perspectives are covered and the methods are mentioned. For instance, I made notes when information is coming from a focus group, a field note or a documentary review and I made clear linkages between the sources when they were coming from different sources. Regarding the visual products from the focus groups (e.g. road map and attitude tool), these were analysed as part of the information provided by the research participants as they were used to elicit conversation and build rapport. The information from these visual tools was documented and included as part of the conversations with the participants.

During the analysis, I was seeking to question the emerging codes and then themes for seemingly connections or contradictory findings. This exercise required in some opportunities to remove, revise or add codes or themes (Appendix H). This mapping exercise was very helpful to revisit, review and reflect on the data many

times. Each time new perspectives emerged as this was a very dynamic process, in which perceptions about the data collected changed according to new information or perspectives. For instance, a new interview or focus group that brought different elements to the analysis needed to be considered and contrasted against to information gathered. This approach was very effective to engage with the data and to explore my own perspectives through and reflexive process. The data analysis development in this project had a strong emphasis on reflexivity, which was critical to ensure a good qualitative research. Richards (2015) argues that the use of reflexivity is pivotal to be transparent and show convincingly how the data is analysed, which builds confidence in the process.

Once I reshaped, renamed and redefined the codes, categories and themes, I reflected on what I was seeing in the data, what mattered or not and how the research questions were best addressed (Saldana, 2009). I focused on three main emerging themes and I wrote three abstracts to describe the themes. This technique was very helpful to test the themes via writing and I identified overlaps and repetitions amongst the themes. This also helped me to recognise any inconsistencies, contradictions and gaps. As result of this exercise, the data began to make sense and I was able to start writing the finding chapters based on the conviction that each chapter was covering the key themes that directly contribute to answer the research questions.

### 3.8 Ethics

Ethical considerations are a fundamental component of any research project. The ESRC (2015) define these as the procedures that “seek to protect, as far as possible, all groups involved in research, including participants, researchers and research teams, research organisations, non-academic collaborative researchers (and organisations) and funders, throughout the lifecycle of the research” (p2). According to the ESRC, all research has ethical implications and ethics in research aim to ensure the maximum benefit of the research whilst minimising the risk of actual or potential harm. This implies that researchers have an ethical responsibility to safeguard academic integrity, honesty and respect for the other people (Punch, 2016). In relation to the subjects of a study, Alderson and Morrow (2004), who have extensively covered the ethical considerations whilst researching with children and young people, argue that a research ethics needs to reflect on the research participants throughout all stages of a project.

Alderson and Morrow (2004) list of 10 critical topics in research ethics that should be asked in order to proceed with research that engages children and young people as participants. This frame is built on multiple questions to guide researchers in thinking about ethics and can be summarised as follows:

1. The purpose of the research
2. Costs and desired benefits
3. Privacy and confidentiality
4. Selection, inclusion and exclusion
5. Funding
6. Review and revision of the research aims and methods

7. Information
8. Consent
9. Dissemination
10. Impact on children and young people

Gallagher (2009) points out that these guidelines are tools to help researchers make ethical decisions, but that these can be criticised for being “prescriptive, with a clear sense of what might be ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ answers” (p13). Despite this, I used this overall framework as the basis for constructing an ethical research project, thoroughly analysing the 10 key points and reflecting on all stages of this project. Some of my essential choices are described later in this section. In order to anticipate and address ethical issues, I followed ethical research guidelines to ensure the safety, rights, dignity and well-being of both the children and young people and adult participants (Morrow, 2009). The first step was to gain approval from the Research and Ethics Committee at the School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, which is a review process aimed at supporting researchers in managing risks associated with research and ensuring that the highest standards are in place at all phases of the research, from design to dissemination.

This research took into account the special considerations required to gain informed consent, ensure confidentiality and anonymity, acknowledge the cultures of the research sites, and refrain from presenting information that may potentially harm participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). As this research project included children and young people as participants, I followed the Minimum Standards for Consulting with Children developed by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children’s Participation (Inter-Agency Working Group on Children’s Participation (IAWGCP),



2007). These standards include; transparency, honesty, accountability, provision of a child-friendly environment, equality of opportunity, as well as the safety and protection of children (Morrow, 2009). As the researcher, my own safety was also scrutinised, and the preliminary risk assessment was found that this study did not pose any potential risk of harm to me. In this assessment World Vision, the gatekeeper, supported me in order to recognise and minimise all risks associated. However, as mentioned elsewhere the fieldwork was conducted in sites that were politically instable, so scenarios changed through the course of the fieldwork and the risk assessment was revisited and adapted to reflect the new safety and security circumstances.

### **3.8.1 Informed consent**

Adult and child participants were asked to give free, voluntary, informed consent. In the case of child participants, consent was also requested from their parents or caregivers due to the study's ethical and legal obligations to protect the children and young people. As Houghton (2015) notes, it is critical to consider consent as a genuine, negotiated and well-understood process and not just formality of getting a signed consent form. In order to ensure this, I undertook the following measures:

- Research participants were informed that they were free to accept or decline the request without any consequences. Their continuation on projects in which they were participating was not conditional on getting involved in the research (Hill, 2005).

- Consent forms and information leaflets were translated into the local languages so participants could understand them well (Alderson and Morrow, 2011).
- Consent forms were explained in detail to participants and all questions they had were answered (Kaiser, 2009).

In order to obtain consent, when I met with the research participants to invite them to join the research project, I introduced myself to them, explained the entire process, and distributed information leaflets and consent forms translated into the local languages. In the instance that a participant was unable to read or understand the information as provided, I liaised with a specialised local staff member who conveyed the information in a sensitive manner according to the participant's needs. I also clarified to participants that their engagement was not associated with any access to services provided by the gatekeeper. I emphasised that this project was being conducted on the premise that consent was a negotiable and ongoing process, and participants were informed that they had the right to refuse to answer any questions, ask for further explanations and withdraw at any time during the interviews or group sessions (Preston-Shoot et al., 2008). Furthermore, I distributed consent forms to children and young people to share with their parents or carers so they could participate in the research (Appendix B). Having this meeting prior to the focus groups gave children and young people enough time to think through their engagement in the research project and have their parents and carers sign and return their consent forms. All adults and child participants acknowledged that they understood the information provided, agreed to participate, and signed the consent forms. Four participants from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study made it clear in their

consent forms that while they wished to participate, they did not want to appear in any photographs or videos.

The risk of any concerns or issues arising from obtaining written informed consent at the two research sites was low as the gatekeeper, World Vision, regularly implements this practice when involving children and young people in consultations or research. Staff members and children and young people noted that the system works well and they felt comfortable with this requirement. However, some issues arose in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study related to the illiteracy of the participants' parents and some people's mistrust of written documents. Therefore, in the preparatory session, the children and young people suggested that, if some parents did not give their consent, I should meet with them in person to explain the project in detail in order to gain their trust and get approval. Nevertheless, this procedure was not necessary as all of the participants' parents provided consent, authorising their children to participate in the research. However, some parents did not feel confident to sign the consent forms due to their vulnerable status as refugees. Hart and Tyrer (2006) note that conducting research with vulnerable young people may bring some issues of lack of trust with people reluctant to sign documents even though they agree to partake in the research. Local staff members confirmed the same rationale. I assessed the situation and took remedial action with a decision to replace the parents' written consent with a documented verbal one. I consulted with the gatekeeper and they agreed with this decision.

As part of the consent process, I reflected on the tensions between the requirements of parental consent for protection and the recognition of children and

young people as competent social actors who can make informed decisions on issues that affect their lives (Skelton, 2008). To minimise this tension, children and young people were provided with opportunities that involved them in the ethics process of the research by engaging them to provide ideas and solutions in the instance any ethical issues or child protection concerns arose whilst conducting the research (Mullender et al., 2002) and incorporating their suggestions. In a concrete case of child protection versus participants' perspectives, the children and young people did not appreciate having their personal information made anonymous, as they wanted to be recognised for their contributions. I explored this with the participants in order to find common ground on the issue which resulted in two solutions; firstly, to use pseudonyms chosen by them and secondly, to create opportunities for them to share their opinions widely through blog posts and other social media as part of their regular activities.

These situations are a reflection of the dilemmas around whether informed consent can be achieved in practice. Hart and Tyrer (2006) argue that gaining meaningful consent is a difficult task as people, especially those from vulnerable populations, could formally agree to participate in research because they struggle to opt out due to multiple factors such as power issues, fear of retaliation or exclusion from services. While working with vulnerable young people in the UK, Skelton (2008) notes that the process of gaining consent is more a formal procedure that aims to gain ethical approval rather than to ensure that research participants fully comprehend the implications of the research. Based on these reflections and in order to ensure to the maximum possible that the participants' consent in my research was

informed and free, I followed some useful insights from Hart and Tyrer (2006) that consider it critical to assess the consent beyond the signatures on the forms and pay greater attention to the non-verbal communications aspects such as body language, silences and ways they may show unease or sharing dissent views. During my interactions with participants, I consistently assessed this situation and I did not find any sign of discomfort or apprehension.

While participants in this project were not offered any kind of monetary compensation for their participation in order to prevent coercion or undue influence (Grant and Sugarman, 2004), based on conversations with the gatekeeper, it was appropriate to give participants a small gift at the end of the fieldwork to thank them for their participation and acknowledge their valuable contribution. The transportation costs, meals and hospitality were also covered by the research project in order to facilitate the children and young people's participation without creating a financial burden for their families. Adult participants were interviewed in their offices or via online platforms so there was no cost associated with their participation.

### **3.8.2 Confidentiality**

In order to ensure the participants' privacy, data were anonymous all identifiers, such as family names and contact details, were removed from the computer notes (Preston-Shoot et al., 2008). Child participants were only identified by a pseudonym, gender and age. As mentioned previously, child participants picked their pseudonym

as a way to keep some level of identity (Morrow, 2008). The issue of anonymity was not a concern for the adult participants who understood this procedure was a common research practice and agreed for their names to be removed and to be identified by a pseudonym and generic role. I explained to all children and young people and adult participants that I would not reveal their full identities, such as first names, family names or locations in reporting the findings. I reassured them that data that could identify the respondents would not be passed on to other people without their permission (Kaiser, 2009). The audiotapes and notes were retained until the publication of the study and stored in my laptop with appropriate access control (password access to the computer plus an additional password to open the documents). All original data collected would also be destroyed six months after the successful completion of the research.

During the introductory session with the research participants, I introduced the confidentiality principles as outlined above and explained to them that there was an exception to the confidentiality agreement when there was a significant danger or risk to the participants or any other young person. I explained that if information about child abuse, violence, exploitation or neglect was disclosed, I was required to breach confidentiality conditions. This information was also included in the informed consent forms and participant leaflets, so participants were fully aware of the exemption. However, some children and young people did not initially understand this situation as they felt that confidentiality must not have any exceptions, so I provided several examples illustrating potential situations and how I must act in response to a case of disclosure. Those examples were well received by the

participants and they also contributed other examples that evidenced their understanding and agreement with the confidentiality exception. As discussed in earlier consent section, there is always a dilemma on the understanding the concept of agreement and whether it is a real agreement or just the acceptance of something that has been imposed. My thought is that each instance needs to be analysed on a case-by-case basis and requires in-depth discussions with the parties who have agreed to something in order to determine the weight of the agreement.

The dilemma of breaching confidentiality is contested in literature, and there are dissident opinions to this practice (e.g. Hill, 2005; Skelton 2008; Morrow 2009). However, as a social researcher working with children and young people, I am called to deal directly with the disclosure of child abuse, violence and exploitation or neglect in order to prevent further harm from taking place (Gallagher, 2009). I believe that the responsibility to intervene and protect cannot be undermined by choosing to prioritise a research study's neutrality and objectivity over the protection of a study's participants. My position as researcher is always to intervene when situations or events require my involvement to prevent threats to participants' safety and well-being. However, the children and young people did not disclose any information that would lead me to believe that they were being, or at risk of being, abused, exploited or neglected.

I was aware that breaching confidentiality and intervening in sensitive situations could not be well understood by the participants and could cause some stress or discomfort amongst them (Hiriscou et al., 2014), but, as all child participants in the two case studies were sponsored by the gatekeeper, I was able to use the

gatekeeper's child protection procedures (World Vision, 2008), which comprised of the critical necessary actions to be taken in case of a child protection incident (Appendix G). These procedures included information about a referral system and access to any support needed. Additionally, the gatekeeper's staff members offered their professional support in the case of a disclosure to deal with child protection issues from legal, medical or psychological perspectives. The gatekeeper also had a confidentiality exception defined in its child protection policy (World Vision, 2012), extensive experience handling child protection concerns and a good system in place in case of disclosure of concerns or incidents. In order to mitigate the tensions and respond effectively, I worked closely with the gatekeeper's staff members in order to reflect on potential risk situations, be prepared to respond to any situation in a balanced manner, review the confidentiality rules and take action as needed.

Regarding anonymising World Vision, the gatekeeper, the organisation agreed to be named. The size of the organisation allows to keep anonymity of participants (e.g. offices in 100 countries, 47,000 staff members and more than 2,000,000 children and young people in programmes). The data presented only include generic information such as countries, regions or cities. All identifiers were removed such as names and last names, names of neighbourhoods, schools, community centres and projects.

### **3.8.3 Child protection**

A key concern of this project was the protection of child participants from risk of significant harm during the research process, including the consequences of



disseminating the research findings (Morrow, 2009). As researcher, I took into account the provisions needed to keep participants protected from any potential or actual harm arising from the research. In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, children and young people lived in refugee camps and other spontaneous settlements. As they needed to travel considerable distances to attend the focus groups and meetings, I closely monitored the security context with the assistance of the gatekeeper's security officer. This helped me to have a good situational awareness and I could discuss the potential risks with them. Based on this information, I was able to understand the security threats related to commuting and take appropriate measures to protect the participants and myself. During the fieldwork, the security situation was precarious and volatile on several occasions so I decided, in consultation with the gatekeeper, to cancel some activities to reduce the security risks that the children and young people and staff members could face by commuting from one place to another. Moreover, I hired a local private transportation company to pick up the children and young people and take them to the venue where the meetings were held and return them home. The company and drivers all signed World Vision's Child Protection Policy (World Vision, 2007) as requested by the gatekeeper. Parents and child participants appreciated this measure as they felt safe and that care was being taken. The meeting venues chosen also contributed to the participants' safety as they were selected based on three criteria: safe location, neutrality and accessibility.

In the *Dhaka* case study, the unstable security situation in Bangladesh had an impact on the children and young people's safety and movements. In order to assess

the political and security environments, I liaised regularly with the gatekeeper's security officer in Dhaka. Several options of venues to conduct the focus groups were discarded due to their unsafe locations and insufficient infrastructures. The venue chosen was located in a safe neighbourhood a few minutes away from where the children and young people lived. Free transportation was provided, but most participants preferred to come on foot. The dates selected for the meetings were those with no school activities scheduled or over the weekend, as children and young people had more free time at those times and there was less of a risk for public demonstrations and rallies, making commuting safer.

Lastly, I excluded some questions about personal experiences on harsh topics such as violence and war. The interview schedule instead focused on how the children and young people engaged in their child-led research, the process and the impact of their work. During the focus groups and meetings, child participants did not show any signs of distress or discomfort. On the contrary, they articulated in their final evaluations that the meetings were important, refreshing, inspirational and entertaining. Many young researchers said they enjoyed being part of this research, as they felt appreciated, valued and respected.

#### **3.8.4 Cultural sensitivity**

As this research was conducted at distinct sites characterised by their own traditions and heritages, the ethical considerations were tailored to reflect the cultures of the sites and not only rely on the guidelines developed in Western universities (Skelton, 2008). In addition to adhering to the guidelines from the Research and Ethics

Committee, I also embraced the child participation and protection protocols of the gatekeeper's local branches in Lebanon, Jordan and Bangladesh (World Vision, 2012). This decision ensured the ethical and protection measures were contextualised and rooted in the local environments. These protocols included respecting cultural traditions, knowledge and local customs. During the fieldwork, I respected and followed the local behaviour codes, valued the local languages, used culturally appropriate techniques with children and young people and honoured the differences amongst participants (World Vision, 2012). Moreover, the gatekeeper had in place contextualised behavioural protocols that researchers and adults who interact with children must agree to, which covered a list of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours (World Vision, 2007).

In order to assess any potential risks around cultural sensitivity, I reflected upon any latent issues and engaged with the gatekeeper and specialised staff to have a plan to address them accordingly. I worked closely with local staff members to understand and respect the cultural sensitivities of the participants, such as religions, values, beliefs, ethnic heritages and languages. I requested information on these matters in order to prepare for challenges and concerns that participants could face and minimised them accordingly. The main issues were around gender, religion and ethnicity. In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, children and young people were Sunni Muslims from very traditional towns in Syria, so the intersection of gender and religion played a significant role in the interactions with participants. In the *Dhaka* case study, children and young people came from a mix of religions and ethnic groups that shaped their relationships with others and positions within the groups.

As Punch (2002) notes in her research in the UK and other countries, I was also aware of the potential for power imbalances between respondents and made a significant effort to ensure equitable participation of boys and girls, taking into account cultural sensitivities, by facilitating the focus groups in a manner conducive to promoting fair and inclusive participation opportunities and conditions for everyone (see page 131). Likewise, Konstantoni (2013) points out that researchers and practitioners need to be aware and address the power imbalances and discriminatory views that children and young people can bring as a result of their own social contexts and influences.

Another issue that was taken into account was the potential stigmatisation of children and young people as poor and marginalised or unwelcome refugees. Children and young people highlighted several times that they did not want to be stigmatised or portrayed as such. They just wanted to be perceived as average individuals without any labels. In order to address these issues of vulnerability and poverty, I was aware and respectful of the social environments in which the participants lived. Taking into consideration their requests, I reinforced the concept that the participants were just children and young people like any other without any labels.

However, in order to explore the emerging issues from this study, the data were disaggregated based on gender, age, religions and nationality of the respondents. However, this approach could be perceived by the research participants as labelling them as there were references to their gender and religions. It did prove relevant analytically, to understand how these categories could intersect

and have an impact in their interactions. This approach was reflected in the data collection, analysis, writing up and dissemination phases. Based on the participants' final evaluations, the project was conducted in a sensitive and respectful manner of the cultural differences and did not adversely affect participants in any way.

Regarding accountability to research participants, as Morrow (2009) recommends, I provided a summary of the final research project report to the interviewees, both children and young people and adults. Child participants received a simplified version of the document in order to make it easier for them comprehend. Participants were asked to provide feedback and their inputs were included in different sections accordingly. A user-friendly version was produced in a non-technical and accessible language (Sullivan et al., 2013) in order to let participants use the research findings in their activities and contribute to the reflection on and improvement of the projects in which they engaged.

### **3.9 Chapter conclusion**

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical and philosophical assumptions underlying the project's research methodology. I located this study within the disciplines that have influenced and contributed to theories on children and young people's participation, especially childhood studies. I critically discussed my personal position within the research project and my epistemological positions, which have been influenced by my academic studies and professional experiences in international development programmes focused specifically on children and young people's

participation in advocacy work. This reflection process has been pivotal to make decisions around the research design in order to ensure that choices are aligned with my ontological and epistemological perspectives, especially about securing the participation of children and young people based on the ideological positions of this study I chose the case study as the preferred approach to respond the research questions as this fitted well with the theoretical positions embraced in this study. The available knowledge, accessibility and depth of data the case study could provide to this project also informed this decision. The case studies also guided the selection of suitable data collection methods and helped establish connections between the theoretical framework, the aim of the study and the research questions as well. Based on the recommendation of several scholars, I opted to use multiple methods and data sources in this study as the research questions and participants' diversity called for different methodological approaches.

The selection of these two cases aimed to explore the engagement of children and young people in child-led research that was similar in terms of their aims and processes but contextually different. I chose to use multiple case studies to increase the likelihood that this decision would give me a better understanding of child-led research through its exploration of the practice within distinct contexts and the opportunity to compare similarities and differences between the circumstances.

In this chapter, I described the recruiting the research participants, which was critical to gain in-depth knowledge of their experiences in each case study and analyse the attitudes and beliefs of the participants. Furthermore, I made an argument for carrying out a reflective account of the fieldwork, particularly in

relation to my interactions with the respondents, children and young people and adult professionals, who provided valuable information to this study. My position as insider researcher was critically discussed and the impact on doing the research. I then documented the data analysis processes and procedures, and the choice of thematic analysis as the preferred technique to establish solid patterns and themes across the data collected. Finally, I outlined the ethical considerations that were paramount to providing a meaningful and safe environment for research participants and how these principles were embedded throughout the entire research process. Safety and security measures were central to this research projects as the fieldwork was conducted in volatile environments as a result of armed-conflict and political instability.

# CHAPTER

# FOUR

## 4 Situating the cases studies

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### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the sites in which this research project was conducted and outline the political and cultural contexts that continue to surround the participating children and young people. This section begins to explore the national policies that have an impact on the children and young people's participation in the two case studies: *Bekaa and Irbid* case study (Lebanon and Jordan) and *Dhaka* case study (Bangladesh). I then delve into the political environments at these locations and how these contexts define and frame the case studies and examine the implications on children and young people's participation while they conducted their child-led research. This analysis of the context helps to respond to the research questions regarding the process and outcomes of child-led research and how these are informed by the contexts where children and young people live. The chapter also includes an account of the framework in which World Vision, the organisation that supported the children and young people in their research, carries out its international development work. I then describe the two case studies chosen as



examples of children and young people in leading their own research. One case study includes Lebanon and Jordan as the young researchers from these two countries conducted a joint child-led research. The second case study includes Bangladesh. The two case studies were selected in order to collect information direct from the participants involved in the research process and represent different contexts.

## **4.2 Situating the case study in the context of Lebanon and Jordan**

### **4.2.1 Lebanon**

Lebanon is a country of approximately 4 million people located in the Middle East, which shares borders with Syria and Israel. In 1943, Lebanon gained independence from France and experienced a brief period of economic prosperity spurred by the agriculture and tourism sectors (Kukrety and Fares, 2016). From 1975–1990, the country faced a fierce civil war due to religious sectarianism and internal division of the Palestinian refugee population in the country (Khalaf, 2002). Since 2000, Lebanon has faced multiple internal and external conflicts that affected its stability and economic growth. The International Labour Organisation points out that the economic growth has declined from around 8% per annum over the period 2007–2010 to 3% in 2011 to 2% in 2012 (International Labour Organisation, 2013). Although Lebanon is considered a middle-income country, 28.6% of Lebanese households are poor and of these, 8% are considered extremely poor – considering the World Bank indicators (Kukrety and Fares, 2016). These figures are related to the urbanisation of

the country, where over 1 million of the population resides in Beirut, the capital city and it is estimated that 87% of the total Lebanese population lives in urban areas. This high level of urbanisation has triggered emerging poverty pockets in and around major cities in Lebanon (World Vision Lebanon, 2012).

Lebanon possesses some of the best levels of gender equality in health and education in the Arab region; however, Lebanese women lag behind significantly in the areas of political representation, leadership and participation in the economy and women bear the burden of some of the sharpest inequalities in the region (Lewis, 2012). Further to this, Lebanon can be considered one of the least active countries in the Middle East in its efforts to amend discriminatory laws governing personal status and citizenship.

#### **4.2.1.1 Children's rights in Lebanon**

Lebanon has a long-standing commitment to children's rights and signed the UNCRC on 26 January 1990 and ratified it on 30 October 1990. The Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography was signed on 10 October 2001 and ratified on 8 November 2004. The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was signed on 11 February 2002 but has not yet been ratified. The Third Optional Protocol on a communication procedure has not yet been signed and ratified. Lebanon has fulfilled their reporting duty, established in Article 44 of the Convention, and subsequently submitted four country reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1994, 1998, 2006 and 2015. A consolidated

fourth and fifth periodic report (2004-2015) on the implementation of the UNCRC was submitted in 2015. The country also implemented policies that satisfied their duty to inform set up by Article 42, which requires States Parties to make the principles and provisions of the UNCRC widely known to adults and children. To that end, Lebanon distributed several publications and conducted awareness sessions to inform the public about these country reports and the concluding observations issued by the Committee.

Lebanon established the Higher Council for Childhood (HCC) in 1994 as the body in charge of formulating national strategies and plans of action in compliance with the UNCRC (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2010) and maintains responsibility for preparing and submitting the periodic progress reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. This institution is comprised of representatives from the government, non-governmental organisations and international organisations who work together to develop childcare and development policies aligned with international human rights and child rights conventions. The HCC, which falls under the Ministry of Social Affairs' purview, ensures the implementation of the UNCRC's general principles in the country's national policies in order to improve the situation of children living in Lebanon and ensure their right to survival, development and protection. The HCC implements strategies that disseminate the UNCRC's principles and raise awareness of children's issues within social, educational, cultural and media institutions (Manara Network for Child Rights, 2011). Its mandate includes developing and implementing the National Plan for Children; however, instead of having one country-level action plan, the HCC designed sectoral action plans,

including those for child protection, rehabilitation and integration of street children, child participation, early childhood, children with disabilities and child trafficking. Currently, the only sectoral strategy approved by the Lebanese Council of Ministers is the child protection action plan, as this was considered a priority due to the level of violence affecting children and young people. The other policies remain in draft copy, but are actively used by the HCC in carrying out its work (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016). The Committee points out that that the sectoral approach embraced by the HCC can sometimes result in a set of fragmented policies and programmes with insufficient coordination and implementation at the regional and local levels.

With regard to child refugees within a country, Article 22 of the UNCRC states that children are entitled to the same rights as a refugee or asylum seeker, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by a parent or guardian. Implementation of this article is closely linked to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention) and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Lebanon has not signed the international refugee convention and, as a result, refugees' rights are not protected, granting residency for only a short period of time, after which refugees must be resettled to another country or could face deportation to their home country (Humud, 2017). To protect asylum seekers within Lebanon, the UN Refugee Agency signed a memorandum of understanding in 2003 with the Lebanese government to grant a minimum set of rights to registered refugees, such as identity cards, freedom of movement and the right to enrol their children in schools (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2004).

The HCC's Child Participation Committee drafted a strategy focused on Lebanese children and young people in order to adapt national laws and regulations inclusive of their views and create a monitoring system to track whether there is an effective inclusion of children and young people in policy discussions (Higher Council for Childhood, 2007). The council also established channels with several local and international NGOs to ensure cooperation and coordination with HCC's efforts to mainstream child participation and provide capacity building to young people and the personnel working with them (Save the Children, 2011). To this end, the HCC held a number of consultations with children and young people to listen to their opinions about its strategies and action plans, including the national strategy to end violence and exploitation, the national plan for children's participation and the code of ethics for media coverage on children (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016). In this regard, the Lebanese government is seen to have increased the opportunities for children and young people to participate in different levels of decision-making processes. Nevertheless, and an important issue for this project, children and young people's participation is still seen as a novelty or something relatively external to the local culture and too progressive (Lewis, 2011). Indeed, it is absent from other parts of the governance system (Cuevas-Parra, 2015). Despite efforts made by the HCC, consultations with children and young people revealed that many still perceived their participation as a special concession rather than a granted and respected right (World Vision, 2009). The Committee on the Rights of the Child shared this concern, stressing that the religious laws and courts and traditional attitudes in Lebanese society are factors preventing children and young people from freely expressing their

views within families, at schools and to the community at large (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006).

#### **4.2.2 Jordan**

Jordan is located in the Middle Eastern region and shares borders with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Occupied Palestinian Territory of the West Bank, Syria and Iraq. The country became an independent state in 1946 when the emirate of Transjordan became a kingdom. Formerly, Jordan was a British mandate. Jordan is a constitutional monarchy in which the King is the head of executive, legislative and judicial powers. The king holds the “legislative power, partly together with the National Assembly and partly through royal decree, to be countersigned by the prime minister and relevant minister(s)” (Jonasson, 2009, p165).

The 2015 census estimates that the population is 9.5 million, which is divided between 6.6 of Jordanian citizens and 2.9 million of non-citizens, a figure that includes refugees and immigrants (DOS and UNICEF, 2016). From this 2.9 million, it is estimated that 1.3 million are Syrian, 0.6 million are Egyptians, 0.6 million are Palestinians and the rest are Iraqis, Yemenis and from other nationalities. The census shows that 42% of the population are children under the age of 18 and the average household size is 4.8 people. The population is predominately Muslim Sunni and religious minorities, including Christians, Druze and B’ahai constitute between 5% and 8% of the population. However, not all minority religions are legally recognised. For instance, Druze and Baha’i citizens are officially registered as Muslims and people

without religious are added to one of the recognised religious denominations for official identification documents (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2010).

Jordan, one of the smallest economies in the region, is considered an upper middle-income country that manages to have an acceptable growth, low inflation and reduced levels of poverty (World Bank, 2016). In 2015, the unemployment has relatively high rates reaching 13.8% and approximately 14.4% of the population lives in poverty (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2017). The Jordanian economy relies mainly on the export of phosphates and potash, as well as remittances from abroad. The economy remains stable but with a slow growth estimated in 2% (World Bank, 2016). Despite the low growth, the economic stability has attracted a large number of foreigners that have joined the local labour market. The size of the officially registered foreign worker population was 335,707 in 2009, making up 23.9% of the total workforce (UNDP, 2013).

#### **4.2.2.1 Children's rights in Jordan**

In Jordan, the UNCRC was ratified by royal decree in 1991 and, subsequently, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography was approved in 2006 and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2007. The Optional Protocol on a communications procedure has not been ratified yet. As part of its reporting mandate, Jordan submitted three reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the UNCRC's implementation

in 1994, 2000, 2006 and 2012. Whilst the Committee acknowledges Jordan's advances enacting the UNCRC, they pointed out that the country ratified the convention with additional conditions on three articles and recommended withdrawing these unnecessary reservations as they are imprecise and the articles do not contradict Jordanian legislation as written (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014). The Jordanian legislative body's reservations were to Article 14 on the child's right to freedom of religion, Article 20 concerning foster care and Article 21 regarding child adoption procedures (Manara Network for Child Rights (MNCR), 2011).

The national body in charge of UNCRC's implementation in Jordan is the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA). It was established with the aim of improving Jordanian families' livelihoods, including children, young people, women and the elderly (NCFA, 2014). In collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, NCFA was mandated to elaborate the first National Plan of Action for children (NPA). The NPA was approved in 2003 and its framework structured around five key sectorial themes: securing a healthy life, development and capacity building, protecting children in difficult circumstances, the media and monitoring and evaluation (ECPAT International, 2008). Besides leading the implementation of the NPA, the NCFA's main responsibilities include the enactment of the Early Childhood Development Strategy and the submission of periodic country reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. This work is conducted in conjunction with UNICEF and an advisory committee comprised of government representatives as well as individuals from non-governmental organisations to



ensure a broad representation of children's experts (NCFA, 2014). From a legislative perspective, the NCFA worked to enact laws pertaining to juveniles and developed a comprehensive Child Rights Act.

In terms of education, 98% of children were enrolled in primary school, including 97% of boys and 99% of girls as part of its effort in ensuring access to, and gender parity in education (UNICEF Jordan, 2016). These efforts helped to reduce child marriage to 7.4% for girls and 0.5% for boys 13 to 18 years. Concerning children and young people's participation, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2014) emphasises the lack of good practices to seek and encourage active participation as a result of cultural factors such as patriarchal values, which traditionally have both gender and age biases. As a result, children and young people are limited in their ability to make personal decisions on issues such as education or marriage. Parents, school teachers and adults in general take authority roles over children and young people, which have an impact on girls and young children more than any other groups (Lewis, 2012). This resonates with this research project as respondents highlighted that one of the obstructive factors that restricted the participation of children and young people, as researchers were social norms that discouraged their engagement in activities that are considered more suitable for adults than for children and young people. Besides the age biases, respondents indicated that gender played a major role in terms of facilitating the participation of boys but restricting the engagement of girls. This will be discussed further in the findings chapters.

Regarding the common contrasting figures of both sites, Lebanon is considered a more advanced country in terms of children's rights policies than Jordan and has developed better strategies and programmes at the national and local level to enhance children and young people's participation. Jordan has shaped policies and programmes to improve the well-being of children but has prioritised some areas such as education and health rather than participation as participatory rights might be considered less relevant within the country context. The next section examines the situation of Syrian refugee children in both host countries and how this situation informed the selection of the case study for this research project.

#### **4.2.2.2 Syrian refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan**

Since the war erupted in Syria in 2011, when a peaceful uprising started to demand the end of the Bashar al-Assad regime, over 400,000 people have been killed, more than 12 million Syrians have been displaced and 4 million individuals have crossed international borders seeking refuge from the bloody armed conflict (UNICEF, 2016). Across the neighbouring region, it is estimated that Lebanon has hosted 1,011,366 Syrians and Jordan received 656,170 Syrian refugees and 50% of that population are children under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2017). The refugee crisis has placed a significant strain on the hosting states' services and economies.

Lebanon's fragile political situation was already under significant tension due to the escalating violence in Syria, exacerbating the already deep political polarisation in the country (Humud, 2017). According to UNICEF (2014), the large

influx of refugees created an education crisis in Lebanon as the existing public and private schools were unable to absorb the high number of Syrian students settling across the country. As a result, 80% of Syrian school-aged children in Lebanon remain out of school. Moreover, UN figures suggest that the number of school-aged refugees in the country exceed the number of Lebanese children enrolled in public schools, having a significant impact on the distribution of resources, use of school premises and quality of learning (Frontier Economics and World Vision, 2016). Furthermore, those children privileged enough to attend a Lebanese school experience multiple limitations such as different curricula, unfamiliar teaching methods and a language barrier as most subjects are taught in English and French and not in Arabic (UNICEF, 2014). Additionally, they live in constant fear of discrimination, bullying and harassment due to their refugee status (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

In Jordan, the refugee crisis has had an enormous impact on the demographics and traditional compositions of cities and neighbourhoods, arousing tensions and competition for public service and job access (No Lost Generation, 2017). As half of Syrian refugees in Jordan are children under 18, the demand for health and education access overwhelmed Jordan's previously well-managed public sector to the detriment of the country's quality of education (UNICEF, 2017). As a palliative response, the Ministry of Education implemented a shift system in overcrowded schools, allowing a school to absorb double the students by teaching a morning and afternoon shift. This policy has been criticised as it could have a negative impact on the current education reform agenda (UNICEF, 2014). Furthermore, child refugees remain at high risk of labour exploitation, forcible recruitment by armed

groups and mistreatment as a result of discrimination, violence, harassment and bullying simply because of their refugee status (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

The political turmoil affecting the host countries has significantly limited children and young people's participation, especially those from vulnerable populations living in refugee camps, spontaneous shelters and border areas under constant threat of attack. However, insecurity and scarce resources are not the only major factors restricting children and young people's ability to participate within emergency settings; cultural values, traditions and patriarchal structures are also major contributors preventing their participation (UNICEF, 2012). This social and political context is closely connected to the research questions as this study aims explore how children and young people used their child-led research to influence decision-making, which was one of the objectives outlined by the young researchers in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study. The subsequent section outlines the Bangladeshi context in which World Vision also operates and the selected site for the second case study.

#### **4.2.3 Situating the case study in the context of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is located in the north east of the region known as South Asia and is surrounded by India and Myanmar. In 1971, Bangladesh became an independent country. Previously it was part of India during the British rule. Bangladesh is one of most populated and highly densely countries the world, and according to the Population and Housing Census 2011, Bangladesh has a population of 144,043,6975,

which includes 72,109,796 males and 71,933,901 females, giving a sex ratio of 100.3 (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Bangladesh, 2013). The same study estimates that the annual population growth rate is 1.47% and most of the population live in the rural areas, 75%, and only 25% live in urban settings.

According to the Asia Development Bank (2017), 31.5% of the Bangladeshi population live in poverty with a very low purchasing power, which is one of the highest poverty rates in the Asia region. This study also indicates that despite of the large impoverished population, the economic growth in Bangladesh has averaged 5.7% per year in the last decade and reached a high of 7.1% in 2016. Few developing countries have that level of growth. The improvement of the economy has an impact in other areas of well-being, for instance 63.6% of households reports access to a sanitary toilet; however there are disparities between rural and urban settings, where rural households without access to water and sanitation 41.8% in rural areas and 18.3% in urban areas.

In terms of education, the 2011 census estimates that the literacy rate of the population has for increased significantly in the last decade, from 37% in 2001 to 51.8 per cent in 2011. The government of Bangladesh has developed a national action plan to ensure that children have access to school. According to the national surveys, 91% of children age 6-10 are in school, 82% of children age 11-15, and 40% of young people age 16-20 (National Institute of Population Research and Training et al., 2016). School attendance is higher among girls than boys age 6-15: however this is reversed among ages 16-24, where there are more males than females enrolled in

the education system. Gender disparity in the literacy rate has decreased with 50.8% of women are now literate in contrast to 54.6% of men. However, the retention of girls in the educational system is connected to the marital status of young women aged 15-24. According to the census of 2011, overall, unmarried girls are likely to achieve higher levels of education as compared to those who are married at a younger age. Statistics show that 30% of unmarried girls are able to complete secondary and higher education, but only 15% of the married girls finish the same level of education.

#### **4.2.3.1 Children's rights in Bangladesh**

In its commitment to international standards, Bangladesh ratified the UNCRC in 1990 with reservations on Article 14 allowing for freedom of thought, conscience and religion and Article 21 on adoption, raising concerns with the Committee on the Rights of Child who subsequently requested Bangladesh to withdraw these two restrictions as they considered them unnecessary (Bank, 2007). However, progress on this matter has been limited and the Committee continues to urge Bangladesh to ensure some progress is made on this matter by the time the next combined report is due in 2021 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2015). The Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict were ratified on 06 September 2000. The Third Optional Protocol on a communication procedure has not yet been signed and ratified. One major development in Bangladeshi children's rights

policy was the review of their 1974 Children's Act and its replacement by the new Children's Act (Act No. 24 of 2013), which was developed utilising the principles and standards outlined in the UNCRC (Mohajan, 2014). The most relevant aspects of this new legislation included: defining a child as every human being below the age of 18, the inclusion of a comprehensive legal framework to protect children from violence and abuse and budget allocation for children's justice (Childreach International and Phulki, 2014).

The definition of a child was a long-term debate in Bangladesh as the age established in the UNCRC conflicted with local practices and traditions that did not consider adolescence as a stage of children's growth (Banks, 2007). The previous uncertainty of what defined a child resulted from multiple definitions of the term "children" within the Bangladeshi legal system. It affected mainly girls whose age was adapted to allow for early marriage and children in conflict with the law who were previously only protected by the Children's Act until the age of 16 (Siddiqui, 2001). Cases varied with some children registered as younger and some older, depending on their situation such as registering a marriage, enrolling in school or facing criminal charges (Banks, 2007). For White (2002), the UNCRC brought a new concept to Bangladeshi society, clashing with these traditional understandings and values: a new category of people defined as "children", built on a universal perception of childhood.

In the country's struggle to agree on a strict definition of age, the Committee on the Rights of Child acknowledged that the enactment of the Children's Act of 2013, recognising children as any person below the age of 18, was major progress

towards the protection of Bangladeshi children's rights. The Committee remains concerned about a new draft law that does not specify a minimum age for marriage and could open the door for judges to authorise marriages of children below the age of 18 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2015). The UNCRC and the Children's Act of 2013 integrated different cultural norms and new notions of childhood, challenging local values and traditional practices, which many times lay in opposition to the terms of the UNCRC, including dowry payments, early marriage and children and young people's participation (Banks, 2007). Bangladeshi society is largely patriarchal and the position of children in relational structures is rooted in the authority that adults have over children and males exert over females, making it very difficult for the youngest members of society to participate in decision-making processes (Ahsan, 2009). Existing social structures in Bangladesh prevent children and young people from participating or expressing their opinions as they are discouraged from doing anything other than school, house or work chores (Mohajam, 2014). Despite these challenges, children and young people engage in many initiatives carried out by NGOs in order to open new opportunities to participate meaningfully in society (Save the Children, 2014).

In addition to the Children's Act of 2013, Bangladesh also included in its national action plan a set goals for children's rights, including objectives to ensure their advancement: health services; the right for healthy food and nutrition; opportunities for girls; protection from all forms of abuse, exploitation and violence; and participation (Save the Children, 2014). Critics, however, state that there is a lack of proper implementation of policies addressing these goals and noticeable gaps in



knowledge and action, resulting in many key actors in the children's rights field being unaware of policies and their implications on existing programmes (UNICEF, 2013). Regarding the governmental policies and programmes intended to ensure that children are registered at birth, thereby ensuring a record of accurate ages of children, the topic of the child-led research addressed in this study, evidence indicate that only 31% of children under the age of five had their birth registered between 2005 and 2012 (UNICEF, 2013). Registration levels differ across regions and provinces, where the lowest registration rates were as low as 11%, generating enormous gaps and inequality amongst different areas of the country (National Institute of Population Research and Training, 2016). These figures place Bangladesh with one of the lowest rates of birth registration in the world (Mohajam, 2014). As a result, there are an estimated 10 million children under the age of five who are not registered, implying that they may not have access to health or education and may be prone to abuse, exploitation, trafficking or imprisonment (Save the Children, 2014). In order to address these issues, the Bangladeshi government amended the Birth and Death Registration Act in 2013 to establish adequate systems to oversee birth registration procedures, including implementing an online information system to facilitate registration within the country and abroad (Childreach International and Phulki, 2014).

#### 4.2.4 Section conclusion

This section has presented an overview of the political, socioeconomic and cultural contexts where the research project was conducted. In the case study, I provided a description of the policy contexts and how multiple factors around policies and practices intersect and inform the discourses around children's rights and participation, which construct childhood in different ways. I discussed key elements that form the social position of children and young people in Lebanon, Jordan and Bangladesh and how these contribute to and restrain the participation of children and young people in their child-led research. I then analysed the relevant policies regarding the engagement of children and young people in social life, especially under the concept of child participation outlined in the UNCRC and explored the differences in each case study.

This review included an analysis of the refugee crisis in Lebanon and Jordan, which are countries that have hosted a major number of Syrian refugees as a result of the civil war in Syria. The influx of refugees has sparked off a social crisis in Lebanon and Jordan affecting mainly labour, education and health sectors that are unable to absorb the needs of the Syrian refugees across both countries (UNICEF, 2014). The change in demographics due to the high number of refugees has increased the tensions and competition between locals and refugees (No Lost Generation, 2017). In Bangladesh, the political and social contexts differ from Lebanon and Jordan, as the country is relatively stable and not affected by major armed conflict, however civil unrest has dominated the political scenarios in the country. However, in terms

of the processes of constructing childhood and understanding of the role of children and young people in decision-making, the three countries seem to be largely patriarchal and therefore the children are perceived as very far removed from relational structures, making it very difficult for them to actively engage participatory initiatives (Ahsan, 2009). The next section discusses the two selected case studies from these countries.

### **4.3 Description of the case studies**

This section describes the two case studies selected for this investigation and provides information regarding the participation of children and young people in engaging in their own child-led research projects.

#### **4.3.1 *Bekaa and Irbid case study***

A group of 40 children and young people, 20 in Lebanon and 20 in Jordan, conducted a child-led research project on issues affecting their lives as Syrian refugees in their host countries. The participants, aged 12 to 17 (at the time of the child-led research), were invited by World Vision to join this project as part of their activities marking the third anniversary of the war in Syria. The organisational goal of this initiative was to examine the opportunities and constraints that children and young people face as Syrian refugees and give them the opportunity to influence the crisis response by expressing their concerns, needs and aspirations. The objectives included:

contributing to the empowerment of the children and young people by involving them as active researchers on issues that affect them; providing them with the skills, tools and knowledge to conduct their own research; and enabling them to share their own findings and recommendations about the refugee situation (Pennikian, 2014).

Initially, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, I envisioned my research project to be implemented only in Lebanon, but the child participants suggested including the views of Syrian refugee children from Jordan as they had worked together in their research. While these two groups never met in person, they shared their data, findings and recommendations through World Vision staff members who facilitated the research process at both sites. The children and young people who participated in Lebanon were Syrian refugees settled in the Bekaa Valley, an area that runs along the Syrian border. They were invited to participate and they accepted based on their interest to engage in this activity. Those interested attended an informative session at which time four of the attendees decided they were not interested and did not join the project. Children and young people in Jordan were from Irbid Refugee Camp, located in northern Jordan close to the Syrian border.

Participants in Lebanon attended four sessions and those living in Jordan attended three sessions. Jordan's meetings were merged into three due to security concerns and time restrictions. The sessions were conducted as plenary gatherings, small group discussions and thematic debates. During the sessions, children and young people brainstormed main issues that they wanted to research, prioritised a research topic and prepared research questions and questionnaires for interviews. The evidence did not show whether the decisions on which issue to focus on where

shaped by gender, race, class, ethnicity, disability or other categories. They then conducted fieldwork over the course of two weeks, interviewing 139 children and young people in total: 51 in Jordan and 88 in Lebanon. The following week, the participants reported back on their interview results and started coding their data using flipcharts to identify the trends. They analysed the information collected using thematic analysis. Once the data analysis phase concluded, the young researchers selected four representatives to write the final report. Those living in Jordan sent their data, findings and analyses to Lebanon to be included in the final research report. Four young researchers, who were nominated by their peers to carry out this task, wrote the final report. Writing the report took two days and it was then shared with the entire group for approval. The child-led research report was launched in March 2014 to mark the third year of the Syrian crisis.

#### **4.3.2 *Dhaka* case study**

Members of a Child Forum in Bangladesh conducted child-led research to explore how the lack of birth certificates affects children and young people in the northern area of Dhaka. This issue was chosen by the young researchers as they believed that the absence of birth certificates limited access to schools and health services and made it difficult to prove the age of children and young people in the case of child marriage or child labour. This Child Forum was established in 2007 as part of World Vision programmes to enhance children's rights and child-friendly environments. The forum has 3,040 child members and is led by a board of 15 elected delegates. The

forum conducts multiple activities to raise awareness on children's rights with a focus on preventing child marriage and ending violence against children. One of the initiatives conducted by the forum was the child-led research project that involved 25 children and young people, aged 12 to 18. Child Forum members were invited to take part in the project and selected to do so based on their interests and motivations. They attended a two-day workshop delivered by three World Vision staff members whose main objective was to develop the children and young people's research skills and support their understanding of the research process. Sessions focused on the following topics: types of research, purposes of research, problem identification, problem analysis, qualitative and quantitative methods, methodological tools and data analysis.

After the training, the young researchers determined their research focus and commenced their fieldwork in three areas of North Dhaka: Adabor, Sher-e-Bangla Nagor and Mohammadpur Thana. They targeted 300 people, mainly community members, using surveys, focus groups and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. As part of the World Vision's child protection protocols, the young researchers were supported and accompanied by adult facilitators to ensure their safety while conducting fieldwork. The research report was launched at a high-level event organised by the young researchers, which was attended by the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and the Project Director of the Office of the Registrar General. Further discussion about this child-led research, findings and dissemination will be discussed in the following three finding chapters.

### 4.3.3 Section conclusion

This section outlined both case studies, finding that, despite the differences in political, social and cultural contexts, the child-led research projects were essentially similar in terms of objectives and methodologies. The young researchers conducted their research to explore and understand issues that affected their lives and used their findings to contribute to change within their communities. These groups of young researchers were supported by the same organisation using similar principles and standards for children and young people's participation, but focusing on different issues according to their context. In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, the child-led research explored the lives of refugee children in host countries while children and young people from the *Dhaka* case study researched an issue they perceived to be a serious threat to their well-being.

## 4.4 Chapter conclusion

The chapter explored how children and young people's rights and participation are outlined in *Bekaa and Irbid* case study and *Dhaka* case study. Although the contexts in Lebanon, Jordan and Bangladesh are different, they have similar approaches to instituting the UNCRC and have used this international treaty as a framework to develop child-focused national-level policies. The level of commitment to the implementation of the UNCRC by these three governments is another common feature, though the political will and rhetoric is not always reflected in the

implementation of UNCRC provisions. All three countries made efforts to enhance children and young people's participation within their policy work; however, there are evident challenges in changing cultural values and traditional mindsets that continue to prevent children and young people from participating in social life. In order to frame the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, I also explored the political contexts of Lebanon and Jordan and the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis in the neighbouring countries.

This chapter included a review of World Vision's programmes in the Middle East region intended to mitigate the impact of the humanitarian crisis on refugees, including initiatives to give children and young people a space to participate in decision-making. The Bangladeshi context was also discussed and how the policies and programmes in place framed their efforts towards the implementation of children and young people's initiatives. The contexts where children and young people conducted their child-led research are relevant to answer my research questions as their motivations and expectations may vary from context to the other as well as the enabling and limiting factors such cultures, values and policies. This resonates with Johnson (2011) who argues that comparing across different contexts and perspectives helps to explore how a variety of factors can determine the abilities of children and young people to meaningfully participate in decision-making. This diversity of contexts needed to be taken into account to analyse the process and outcomes of the child-led research in the two case studies. Similarly, Punch (2003) notes that the surrounding environments where children learn and participate are defined by the spaces, cultures and values and the access to the resources to engage



in social life. In this regard, Johnson (2011) points out that in order to understand how children and young people's perspectives are valued in decision-making, it is critical to study the contexts where their participation happens. This research project analyses these perspectives according to each case study in the findings chapters.

Lastly, the chapter discussed the two case studies selected for this research project and provided information regarding the participation of children and young people in child-led projects. The case studies have been selected for depth of data and breadth of context, which provide a concrete base for the research, as they are similar with elements in each that overlap. In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, a group of Syrian refugee children embarked on child-led research to explore how their lives are affected by their refugee status in their host countries. In the *Dhaka* case study, a group children and young people who are members of a Child Forum conducted child-led research to explore how the lack of birth certificates affects children and young people in the northern area of Dhaka. The findings from the case studies selected for this research project are discussed in the following three chapters.

# CHAPTER

## FIVE

### 5 Building processes for creating knowledge through child-led research

#### 5.1 Introduction

As discussed in the literature review chapter, the emergence of children's rights as outlined in the UNCRC and the development of participatory research methodologies have shifted the position of children and young people from subjects of research to leaders of their own research (e.g. Woodhouse, 2003; Kellett 2005; Thomas, 2015). This chapter discusses how child-led research is defined and experienced by the research participants in the *Dhaka* and *Bekaa and Irbid* case studies. Throughout the course of the chapter, Question 2 is addressed:

**Question 2** - What are the processes of child-led research that positively or negatively influence decision-making?

Besides the analysis of Question 2, this chapter also touches on Question 1 regarding children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research. The chapter argues that the definitions of

child-led research developed by academics, practitioners and children and young people are similar in content and purpose; however their implementation and use of the findings vary from one project to another. In this chapter, I critically discuss definitions and understanding of child-led research and explore whether child-led research contributes to knowledge generation and analyses how this is connected to the expertise that children and young people already have in their lives. I conclude by deeming the conceptualisation of child-led research to be a legitimate and feasible participatory project that facilitates children and young people's engagement in knowledge generation on issues relevant to their lives.

## **5.2 Child-led research: towards a definition**

Academics and practitioners have shown an increasing interest in the participation of children and young people as researchers on issues that are relevant to them (James, 2007; Kellett, 2009; Fleming, 2011; Thomas, 2015). Furthermore, literature has scrutinised and problematised the participation of children and young people in research and explored its implications in order to analyse its benefits and challenges (Punch, 2002; Alderson 2008; Shier, 2015). Despite this attention, child-led research remains a contested term and academic literature has not yet provided an agreed upon definition. As discussed in Chapter Two, the lack of definition or framework to understand this practice has generated some tensions between academics and practitioners, limiting, to some extent, the recognition of children and young people as competent actors who can lead their own research (Fleming, 2011).

In the literature, several authors adopt similar terminologies to define research undertaken by children and young people. Kellett (2010) defines child-led research as ‘research that children design, carry out and disseminate themselves with adult support rather than adult management’ (p195). Spyrou (2011) uses the term children as primary researchers and provides a description consistent with Kellett’s definition whereby:

Children are actively involved in all stages of the research process. They are in charge of identifying research questions, deciding on methods and collecting data and analysing, interpreting, reporting and disseminating the research findings. (Spyrou, 2011, p155)

According to this account, children and young people participating as direct researchers have control over the decisions made in a research project and these decisions shape the entire research process. Furthermore, Spyrou (2011) argues that this approach strengthens children and young people’s opportunities to collect data from an insider perspective on specific topics, which implies that they know the topic well and have easy access to the respondents. This approach allows them to explore issues in an entirely different manner to that of an adult researcher as they have direct contact to their peers and able to look for angles and perspectives differently than their adult counterpart. This approach, however, could be problematic and raise some tensions as children and young people in their role as insider researchers can potentially marginalise other children based on hierarchies, feeling of privilege or simply by having a different understanding of the multiple dimensions of childhoods. Shier (2015) utilises similar child-led research terminology, but prefers the terms ‘children as researchers’ or ‘research by children’ as he believes that the child-led

research term can fuzzy the active engagement of children and young people as child-led could imply the absent of adult support in the research process. Children and young people who participated in this research project defined themselves as young researchers and they claimed they conducted their own child-led research. In the following sections, I discuss the research participants' understanding of child-led research, including young researchers', adult facilitators' and the supporting organisation's views.

### **5.2.1 Research participants defining child-led research**

Data from this study showed that staff members and participating children and young people shared similar views but also differences as to what a child-led research project entailed in the two case studies. When I asked the staff members and children and young people to develop an operational definition of child-led research it was evident that, while they understood the concept, the development of a definition was problematic for staff members and children and young people alike. When I asked adult participants to explain the meaning of the child-led research, they expressed coherent ideas about the elements and phases of the child-led research process, but struggled to provide a specific definition. I noticed during interviews that the question of how to define child-led research was challenging for respondents, as they felt frustrated at being unable to provide a definition.

While reflecting on this issue, in one of the sessions held with participants from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, I asked staff members to develop collectively a working definition based on the key elements they considered critical to the child-

led research. In order to do that, I used a brainstorming technique that consisted of writing ideas on small pieces of paper and then putting them all together to form one idea or sentence. Using sticky notes, they wrote down words that they thought were essential to define this approach. They then placed the sticky notes on a table and moved them around to form coherent phrases. They completed the definition by adding additional words. The result of the exercise culminated in this definition:

Child-led research is a participatory process where children and young people, either with or without the support of adult facilitators, conduct pieces of research by selecting the topic, designing the tools, collecting and analysing data and providing recommendations. (Excerpt from field notes, 28 March 2016)

According to this definition, it is possible to identify four foundational elements of this approach as per the staff members' understanding. These elements included: (1) a participatory process, (2) conducting research, including tool design and analysis, (3) potential engagement of adult facilitators and (4) providing recommendations for action. In order to analyse the first component, I asked them why they defined child-led research as a participatory process. They explained that they perceived child-led research as a form of collective participation as opposed to an individual exercise, in which children and young people engage in a joint project to reach the common goal to influence decision-making. In exploring the second element, staff members explained that 'conducting research' implies that children and young people lead the research process from designing the project to analysing the data to disseminating the findings. They, however, mentioned child-led research could also include the participation of adult facilitators who support the children and young people.

This brings to the discussion the third element of their definition, which made reference to adult's engagement. When I asked why this was a substantial component, the staff members responded that the adult facilitator was important but not essential to support the children and young people. They believe that children and young people can lead their own research without an adult facilitator if they are equipped with the skills needed (skills will be discussed in Chapter Seven). When asked if the engagement of an adult facilitator changes the nature of a child-led process, staff members argued that the inclusion of adult facilitation does not undermine the child-led process. On the contrary, they believed that the participation of an adult facilitator could strengthen the process and that this aspect should be acknowledged. This resonates with Shier (2015), who suggests that the facilitating role contributes to enable children and young people to conduct their own research based on mutual learning and keeping the appropriate balance between the role of the young researchers and the adult facilitator. One staff member, Kamal, summarised this position:

I believe that children and young people are able to lead their own research. When people ask me about that, I always say that I believe that this process can be done with the support of adults and this support does not weaken the child-led process. Children and young people want support, and when this support is provided as facilitation, this help is good. (Kamal, staff member, Lebanon)

Kamal's answer unpacks one of the recurrent concerns that the practitioners face when people question the validity of the child-led research based on the participation of an adult in the process. Staff members explained that many times

they needed to respond to the queries of peers, colleagues, stakeholders or decision makers who challenge the substance of this approach based on the participation of an adult facilitator as they believe the only way to call this approach child-led was when it was completely adult-free. Kamal and the other staff members engaged in this study disagreed with the detractors' position as they clarify that children and young people can conduct research with or without adult support and this can still be called child-led as long the adults act only as facilitators.

Regarding the last component of this definition, I asked them why they included 'providing recommendations' as part of the meaning of child-led research. They responded that one of the main features of child-led research was recommendation for action that children and young people provide based on their research findings. They argued that children and young people did not engage in this project to only generate new information: they also wanted to make a difference in their lives and the lives of their peers. This was reflected in the recommendations the young researchers developed, which have a strong advocacy focus. This echoes Sharpe's (2015) reflections that children and young people join research initiatives in order to express their views and to use the research as a tool for change. This fact revealed one of the blurred areas within child-led research about whether it should be seen as a knowledge generation process or a method for the young researchers to influence decision-making and make a change in their lives? The answers from the staff members and the young researchers indicate that it is a mix of both, in which children and young people engage in research to create knowledge and this



knowledge is used for advocating for changes. This was also observed in the *Dhaka* case study.

In turning to the question of what child-led research means to children and young people, the data gathered in this study show some significant similarities but also some differences between the staff members' and children and young people's definitions. It is important to note that a certain communality was anticipated between the facilitators' and young researchers' understandings as the facilitator likely shared their ideas with the young researchers when they went through the process together. As mentioned previously, staff members struggled to conceptualise this approach, so I reflected on how this situation could be similar while asking children and young people about their understanding of child-led research concept. I mirrored this in my field notes:

Children and young people came back from the tea-break and I wanted to start the session by asking a question about the definition of child-led research. I was a bit worried about how the discussion would go as this question was difficult for staff members. I was thinking about how to frame it in a simple way without asking for a proper definition. I decided to begin by asking, 'How many of you think you are a researcher?' Instantly, everyone raised his or her hands. When they noted that everyone responded affirmatively, there were explosions of laughter. I then asked 'How many of you want to be a researcher as an adult?' Once again, everyone raised his or her hands. There was more laughter. I was amused by their reaction. They were spontaneously giving reasons why they thought they were researchers with a clear understanding of the concept. Thus, I was ready to ask the 'difficult' question about the meaning of child-led research. (Excerpt from field notes, 11 May 2016)

As revealed in the field notes, children and young people did not question their roles as researchers and they were confident about the process they had gone through.

After this initial consideration, I asked questions about the meaning of the child-led research. However, to unpack the term as a definition was not as simple for the children and young people; it was easier for them to explain the process rather than define it. When I asked what child-led research meant to them, the immediate response by the children and young people from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study were words like determination, expression of opinion, help, credibility and achievement. I noticed that they gave very positive values to their project, but they were not providing terms that could help grasp their definition of child-led research approach. I then asked them to explain what they did and why they called it child-led research.

In order to compare how the children and young people in the two case studies understood child-led research, I will review two definitions, one from each case study. It is worth noting that these children and young people carried out their research projects in different countries and never met one another, but they provided similar conceptualisations of child-led research elements. The first concept was provided by Amal from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, who developed a definition that was endorsed by her peers during conversations at the focus group session:

This is child-led research because we, as children and young people, investigate topics that matter to us, we look for the reasons and causes, and with this information we provide ideas for solutions and recommendations.  
(Amal, aged 16, Lebanon)

Amal described her research project as child-led because they studied an issue in depth and, based on their findings, produced a list of recommendations and solutions to make a difference in their communities. When Amal explained this concept, one

of her peers, Abdulla, aged 18, added that key components of the child-led research are that they developed their own research questions and questionnaires, collected the data and wrote the final report with the information gathered. Amal, in the last part of her description of child-led research, highlighted that they provided solutions and recommendations based on their discoveries. The participants explained this component in interviews as children and young people engaged in these types of projects to make a difference in their lives. This was evident from the recommendations that young researchers provided in the research report.

Most of the children and young people who participated in this research stated that their main motivation to participate was to make a difference in their lives and to fight for social change. This is consistent with other studies that suggest that young researchers often engage in research in order to produce knowledge that can contribute to potential life changes and promote respect for their rights (e.g. Alderson, 2008; Bucknall, 2012; Blanchet-Cohen, 2014). Fleming (2010) points out the young researchers are motivated to influence others by using their findings to advocate for change rather than to be published in academic journals and books, which would be one of the important motivation for many academic researchers. Other current studies also point out that when children and young people act as researchers they focus on aspects of their lives that they want to research in order to share their findings with others and put their recommendations into action (e.g. Roberts and Nash, 2009; Blazek and Hraňová, 2012; Sharpe, 2015, Shier, 2015).

In discussing Amal's definition, Malik, aged 14, stressed the notion of children and young people as eyewitnesses. He claimed that they knew exactly what was

happening to them and so can give a first-hand description of the issues or themes affecting their lives. During the interview, Malik emphasised that the term child-led research implied that the children and young people were telling a story about children's lives and this was done based on the information they collected. His peer researcher, Safa, aged 14, built on Malik's idea by explaining that the young researchers are well-positioned to lead their research as they are knowledgeable of their lives and when they research what happens to them, people will believe them. When I asked why people will believe them, they said that children and young people have their 'own way of expression' that is honest and transparent and the fact that the report was written by them gave more credibility to the content as the information came from their own experiences and their peers. Despite being sympathetic to this reflection, I believe that the issue of the young researchers' credibility is arguable. One of the main constraints that the child-led research project faced at the two case studies was that some adults did not believe that children and young people were capable of carrying out the research. Staff members interviewed pointed out that they observed resistance from some adults who did not trust in the abilities of children and young people to engage in research.

The young researchers also mentioned multiple times that some adults questioned their research, as they did not believe they were able to do it. Interestingly, Malik did not focus on credibility in his description of the child-led research but instead used the expression 'eyewitness' to argue that children and young people could give first-hand explanations of what happened to them. The notion of children and young people as experts on their lives will be discussed in the

coming sections. Children and young people from the *Dhaka* case study also debated and agreed on an operational definition of child-led research. Aalok from Bangladesh provided this concept:

Child-led research is when research is organised by children themselves on issues that are important to us. It is child-led when children decide what to research; we create the questions and interview people to get data to understand a problem and to find solutions. (Aalok, aged 15, Bangladesh)

Aalok described child-led research as the process whereby children and young people organised and managed a research project in order to obtain information to help them understand and resolve problems that affect them. This quote emphasises that child-led research can lead to offer solutions not only recommendations to the issues that young research investigated. This account was complemented by Aashi, aged 13, who explained that the core and distinctive point is that children and young people were in charge of the entire research process from planning to implementation to reporting, and this control component made this research project a child-led one. Similar to the young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, Bangladeshi participants argued that child-led research was a process in which they controlled different research phases with the goal of exploring issues that affect them. They did this not just to get new information and generate knowledge; they wanted to use these new perspectives to improve the different situations that affected them and other children.

When I asked the staff members in Bangladesh about the definitions provided by the young researchers and staff members engaged in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, they mostly agreed on the concepts as beings very similar to their own

understandings. During interviews, they explained that in order to understand the child-led research it is important to contrast it to academic research, so the differences that emerge help them to define it and frame its use and implications. Staff members argued that this approach does not pretend to be academic research as the children and young people do not have all the tools, knowledge nor the intention, to conduct rigorous academic research like that compiled by research institutions and universities.

During interviews, staff members made a clear distinction between child-led and academic research, and argued that they mainly differ in the methodologies used and the standards required. This resonates with research conducted by Cornwall and Fujita (2012) who argued that this type of participatory and collective knowledge generation use less theory but its strength is connected to the characteristic of those who engage in carrying out the research process. For instance, young researchers do not require to follow certain theoretical frameworks or obtain permission from ethics committee. Though they stressed that the children and young people have the ability to conduct research, they pointed out that it should be based on different requirements than academic studies and on the premise that the young researchers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools required to carry out research suitable to their experience, age and context. This reflection is consistent with findings from other existing studies that show that research undertaken by children and young people is an effective approach to explore the views and experiences of the participants, but also faces multiple issues regarding methodological and ethical approaches (Kellett, 2005; Roberts and Nash, 2009; Spalding, 2012; Wood, 2015).

Staff members explained that a substantial difference between child-led research and academic research is the fact that children and young people did not use theoretical frameworks as it was considered overwhelming for them. Staff members argued that the research projects carried out by children and young people focus mainly on exploring their peers' as well as their own perceptions and experiences on issues that affected both groups. Tuhi, a staff member from Bangladesh developed this position further:

I think they do not need to understand the critical background ... as the level of participation could be affected, for example, by [the] children's capacities to understand theories. (Tuhi, staff member, Bangladesh)

Tuhi echoed the views of other staff members and young researchers who also believed that while theoretical backgrounds were essential for academic research, they were less relevant for the child-led research approach. They argued that the difficulties faced when accessing and selecting theories could undermine the children and young people's ability to conduct research as this could discourage them from taking part of the research. They also articulated that an excessive focus on theoretical background could destabilise the children and young people's own understanding of the social problems, diminishing one of the pillars of the child-led research approach. This argument could be effective, but there are other perspectives that dispute this belief. For instance, Alderson (2008) agrees that children and young people can have difficulty understanding critical analysis or theories, but also points out that evidence show that some young researchers can easily engage in that type of analysis. This however does not address the point made

by the facilitators as Alderson's point focuses on a few number of children and young people who might be able or interested to carry out this task. In comparing child and adult research, Kellett offers an option to discuss this contrast:

What is clear is that research by children is fundamentally different from adult research about children and we cannot use the same norms of reference nor the same terms of measurement and assessment. (Kellett, 2005, p31)

As Kellett (2005) argues, child-led research practice differs from adult research and they are not comparable based on academic standards. Although, this point may be disputed by data from this study that provide support for the belief that child-led research is research that is conducted with the aim to generate new knowledge regardless comparison with academic standards. This comparison tends to devalue the knowledge created by the young researchers. Adults interviewed in this study stated that they do not expect child-led research to be considered the same as academic research as their processes are largely different. When I asked about this difference, it was suggested that this view could be a manifestation of a broader belief that research conducted by NGOs is different from academic research standards, so inferring from this position implies that child-led research cannot be compared to academic research. For instance, Lukas, a staff member who engaged in the dissemination of the child-led research report, pointed out that the young researchers do not have the qualifications to carry out academic research. However, this opinion can be argued in the sense that qualifications are not always necessary when the young researchers have the skills needed and use adequate methodologies to conduct child-led research. Staff members rather agreed that the major value of



the research conducted by them was the quality of information gathered by the children and young people using a good methodology and the translation of these findings into a report written entirely by them. This, however, necessitates the implementation of supportive strategies to assist children and young people in increasing their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, Lundy and colleagues (2011) argue that it is not for children and young people to prove their abilities to engage in research as the UNCRC presumes that they have capacity to form their own views and adults are called to develop the mechanisms needed to support them.

Similarly, in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, staff members agreed that the child-led research project could not be considered academic research and stated that it was never envisioned that way. They explained that the child-led research project was developed as an alternative to traditional children and young people's participation methodologies in order to provide young researchers with the opportunity to work together to collect evidence and information that could be used in their child-led advocacy work. They, however, defended the quality of the process in terms of the methodology. Joumanah, a staff member from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case, argued that that child-led research is "a piece of work with a systematic process and methodology that aims to create new knowledge or generate new facts or information". Through this reflection, Joumanah recognised that child-led research is research, even though she pointed out that it could not be considered academic research. Staff members mentioned that it is critical to ensure and demonstrate that the child-led research had a good process to safeguard its strength, especially when children and young people use their findings to argue for a change in their lives. This

reflection from staff members is reinforced by Kellett (2005) who argues that it is incorrect for a child-led research approach to be exempt from scrutiny and requires a commitment to quality and inquiry.

Staff members also emphasised that the discussion around the concept of child-led research should not just be around the methods or techniques but a major focus should be on the variation of themes that children and young people chose to investigate, taking into account their own individualities, and its relevancy to their lives (e.g. girls studying child marriage as a major concern in their lives or refugee children researching how their refugee status had an impact on their well-being). This focus, however, begs the question of how age, gender, class, religion, education and ethnicity can have an impact on children and young people's ability to conduct research. Some of these issues are discussed in Chapter Seven. I now move to a discussion on the commonalities and differences amongst definitions of child-led research.

### **5.2.2 Commonalities and differences between academics', practitioners' and children and young peoples' definitions**

What began to emerge from the definitions given in this study is that the child-led research is characterised by several necessary components to determine whether the research conducted by children and young people is actually both research and child-led, in contrast to research that is adult-led or merely participatory. The concepts elaborated by the research respondents comprised distinct features that should be taken into consideration whilst planning and implementing this approach.

These include the ownership of different research phases, the motivations of children and young people to make a difference, the research focus on their own experiences and the role of adults as facilitators.

All of the outlined conceptualisations were divided into four columns in Table 6 and definitions by scholars were compared against those proposed by this study's participants. The first column shows that all the definitions included clear components of participation, ownership and control of all phases of the research process. In the second column, the children and young people's definitions indicated that motivation to find solutions based on research data that would make a difference in their lives was a key component. Despite the fact that the staff members' definition did not explicitly include the motivation component, the motivation of children and young people to use research findings to make a difference in their lives was mentioned in interviews with staff members as one of the critical attributes of child-led research. The third column demonstrates that there is a common understanding of the focus of child-led research around issues that matter to children and young people and have an impact on the lives. The fourth column illustrates the role of adults as a main component in the professionals' conceptualisations, but it is absent in the children and young people's definitions. Interestingly, the young researchers from both case studies did not make any reference to adult participation while explaining the meaning of child-led research.

**Table 6 Comparative summary of definitions of child-led research**

	<b>Ownership of research phases</b>	<b>Children and young people's aims and motivations</b>	<b>Focus of the research</b>	<b>Adult's role</b>
<b>Amal (girl from Bekaa and Irbid case study)</b>	Children and young people investigate topics and look for the reasons and causes	Children and young people's motivation is to provide ideas for solutions and recommendations	Children and young people determine the focus based on 'topics that matter to us'	
<b>Aalok (boy from Dhaka case study)</b>	Research is organised by children themselves	Children and young people aim to understand a problem and find solutions	The focus is 'on issues that are important for us'	
<b>Staff members</b>	Children and young people conduct pieces of research		The focus is taken by selecting the topic	Research can be done either with or without the support of adult facilitators
<b>Kellet (2005)</b>	Children and young people design, carry out and disseminate their research			Adults support rather than manage
<b>Spyrou (2011)</b>	Children are actively involved in all stages of the research process		The focus is from an insider's perspective	
<b>Shier (2014)</b>	Research projects are mainly initiated and directed by children and young people themselves	Children and young people aim to produce findings to achieve changes and transformation in their communities	Focus on exploring the provision of services and the respect of their rights	Mainly facilitated by adults working in the NGO sector

Based on conversations with them, the adult role is not perceived as determinant in defining their research project as they see adults as usual and natural supporters of their activities and not leading them. They indicated that adult inclusion in the research process does not define whether it is child-led or not; instead the adult support is defined by the level of control that children and young people exerted over the research project, in which the adult facilitator just guide and the young researchers make the decisions.

The young researchers clearly stated during interviews that their project is child-led research as they felt they managed all decisions over the course of the project. Furthermore, they highlighted that the adult role was an important one and they appreciated it in terms of the support they received and the fact that the adults did not try to manage the project. Building on this notion of child-led research, Hanadi from Lebanon defended the authorship of the report by saying that they did everything without adult interference in the process, which reflects the position of the majority of the child participants:

I can repeat any part of the report because I wrote [it]; I analysed the themes we discovered, we did it ... Nobody can replace the personal experiences that are reflected in the report. (Hanadi, aged 16, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

Hanadi made this reflection explaining situations that she has faced many times in which people did not believe that they conducted the research by themselves. She explained that her research was child-led because they did it without adult intervention and she could prove it by explaining any part of the text and showing where the data collected in addition to their personal experiences were included in

the report. Hanadi's reflection echoes Fleming's (2010) views that considers that one of the key factors that define child-led research is the ownership and control that children and young people have over the research process, which implies that they have a management role and the adults have a supportive one. When I asked the other participants how the role of adults influenced their research, their answers were always similar to Hanadi's response. In-depth analyses of the role of adults in the child-led research projects will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

### **5.2.3 Section conclusion**

This section discussed the different understandings of the definitions of child-led research and included an analysis of the views of scholars, practitioners and children and young people. I examined how the research participants in the two case studies define child-led research projects and then compared with the concepts offered by scholars. From practitioners' and children and young people's perspectives, essential features that define child-led research were the following: (a) the control that young researchers feel they have over the different phases of the research process, (b) the motivation to make a difference in their lives using their findings to influence decision-making, (c) the focus on topics that matter to them, and (d) the role of adults as facilitators who assist but do not manage the young researchers. The section explored the different views that research participants have about child-led research, especially the disparities that they highlighted when comparing child-led research with academic research. This might show a sense of devaluing the claims of young researchers, who believe that they conducted research despite the fact the standards

of measuring the quality are different. This view could be related to a wider belief that research conducted by NGOs is different from academic research, so extrapolating this idea child-led research cannot be compared to academic research. However, data from this study shows that the young researchers were able to generate new knowledge based on information they collected during fieldwork.

### **5.3 Child-led research as knowledge production**

As discussed in the preceding section, child-led research is a contested term and one of the unresolved questions regarding this approach is whether children and young people can generate knowledge through their engagement in research as researchers (Ansell et al., 2012; Porter et al., 2012). Törrönen and Vornanen (2014) argue that children and young people, as experts on their own lives, have the ability to engage in research and generate knowledge if they are provided with adequate methodologies and facilitation. However, a critical question arises as to how the expertise and experiences that children and young people have on their own lives are considered and how they are connected to knowledge generation. This also challenges how children and young people's expertise provides new and different perspectives from traditional research conducted by adult researchers. In the next sections, I first discuss whether children and young people are experts on their own lives and how they bring their experiences to the child-led research process. I then look at how children and young people's expertise and experiences are used in knowledge generation

### **5.3.1 Children and young people as experts on their lives**

As discussed previously, academics and researchers are progressively recognising children and young people as experts on their own lives and competent interpreters of their worlds, unlocking new possibilities for understanding how children and young people construct their social worlds (e.g. Mayall, 2000; James, 2007; Mason and Danby, 2011). This is consistent with the opinions of children and young people that participated in this research who believe that they hold the understanding of how they experience their daily lives and the key issues relevant to the contexts in which they live and grow. They claim that this knowledge is based on their experiences and expertise. Some child participants argued further that they are the only people who truly know what happen to them, as opposed to adults who hold only a narrow view of their lives.

When I asked the children and young people to describe the notion of experience and expertise, they did not refer to these terms conceptually, but articulated that they know a large number of things based on what they learn in their daily lives through their families, schools and interactions with others. Along the same lines, Collins and Evans (2002) argue that experience is defined as knowledge or skills acquired over some years, and expertise is described as knowledge or skills acquired, irrelevant of number of years, but rather from practice. This connects to the concept of children as experts in their own lives, coined by Langsted (1994), which implies that children and young people have the knowledge and perspectives to understand their lives, and thus are best placed to understand their own lives



(Clark and Statham, 2005). This expertise is a combination of the knowledge they have learned and the experience they have gained through the course of their lives.

The growing acknowledgment of children and young people's experiences and expertise is changing the traditional views that earlier portrayed them as passive objects of research to a stance that recognises them as social actors with the competence and abilities to understand difficult and multifaceted issues (Christensen and Prout, 2002). Existing studies demonstrate that children and young people possess valuable understandings and perspectives on their lives and can offer diverse insights often contrary to adults' viewpoints (Prout, 2002). From observing the interactions of the children and young people at the two case studies, they were very confident whilst presenting their research findings and were knowledgeable about the contexts in which their studies were conducted. They explained in detail all of the issues covered, and they firmly debated with their peer researchers when some opinions differed from one young researcher to another. I reflected this in my field notes:

The children and young people wanted to present their research findings and asked me if I was interested to hear their presentation. They were very excited, as they wanted to have a formal presentation and not only a conversation with me during focus groups. They began with thoughtful analyses of the context and research topic. They were very knowledgeable and articulate. While they were presenting, I was wondering if they learnt this during their research process or if they had some knowledge before. I asked them, and all of them replied that they knew the issues very well before because it is a part of their daily lives. They mentioned that they are aware of their lives better than many adults who are more worried about other issues in life. Though, they did mention that they did not know anything about research methods before the project. (Excerpt from field notes, 20 February 2016)

Once the children and young people's presentation finished, I asked them about their contribution to the research project, and they emphatically declared that they brought their experiences and knowledge about their lives to it. Faria, aged 13, from Bangladesh noted, "We know more and better about what happened to us. So, we can research our own issues." Faria assertively signalled that children and young people know very well the issues that affect them and this entitles them to engage in research that explore their lives. This positive reflection on her knowledge and abilities to understand the issues that affect children and young people could, however, raise some issues around biases or dominance of experiences. For instance, as discussed elsewhere, young researches could reflect on one type of childhood and ignore others, thus generating knowledge that privileges the dominant group(s). Children and young people in Lebanon expressed similar thoughts to Faria, but they went further by reflecting on the fact that they were able to encounter new things in their research project:

We discovered issues that were covered or hidden, and we brought them into the light and exposed them to the public. We explained in detail the things that affect children. (Amal, aged 16, Lebanon)

Amal summarised the recurring conviction amongst the children and young people who participated in this research as an unveiling of new facts and information about their lives, based on their experiences and own knowledge. Furthermore, Amal pointed out during interviews that they focused on themes that were relevant to them as children and young people, but also taking into account specific

considerations of their status as refugees in the host countries of Lebanon and Jordan. I then asked why she believes that alongside her peer researchers they were able to discover issues not covered by the extensive research on the Syrian refugee crisis conducted by multiple actors including NGOs, universities and research institutions. She unambiguously responded:

Because adults see other problems, they do not pay attention to our problems. We talked about bullying at school, and maybe an adult researcher will talk more about economic problems. They are not going to consider bullying [to be] a big problem during a war. (Amal, aged 16, Lebanon)

In this reflection, Amal compared the issues studied in mainstream research with those investigated by the young researchers. She believed, as do many of her peers, that in a war and refugee situation like the one they face, adult research mostly focuses on topics such as economic hardship and access to health care, neglecting some of the issues that are relevant to children and young people, for instance, bullying and harassment at school. When I asked staff members about Amal's claim, they said that they reviewed eight research reports released the same year where the children and young people conducted their own research project. The main topics covered by these reports were displacement, poverty, falling incomes, health care, education, child labour, economic exploitation, sexual and gender-based exploitation, children in combat, child prisoners, etc. Only one report included brief information about the bullying and harassment experienced by Syrian refugee children at school.

This finding suggests that children and young people are more likely to bring new perspectives into the research agenda around refugee children experiences. This

was done by defining a new focus to the research topic, for instance, bullying and harassment over other more widely researched topics and by using their own experiences and knowledge to understand the issues affecting refugee children's well-being. This example shows that when children and young people use their own perspectives to set the research agenda, they become more connected to the aspects of their well-being that they are interested in improving. This is consistent with other studies that show that children and young people's knowledge and experiences are essential to understanding the issues affecting children and young people and how they can be leveraged to secure their well-being (e.g. Roberts and Nash, 2009; Fleming, 2010; Mason and Danby, 2011; Newell et al., 2012).

Similarly, the young Bangladeshi researchers perceived that they contributed to research with expertise on the themes covered in their study. They argued that this expertise comes directly from everyday experiences in addition to their interactions within the context where they live, for instance schools and communities. This is connected to the work of the young researchers who reflected on their own cultures and social instances in order to analyse the data. Based on my observations during focus groups, children and young people were very knowledgeable on the issues that have an impact on their lives as a result of a broad mix of analyses between personal experiences and those of other children and young people. Many of them were able to explain some possible underlying causes of their problems and the negative consequences they faced from the inaction to improve these situations. For instance, they mentioned extreme poverty, corruption and discrimination. When I asked staff members how children and young people's

expertise contributed to the research, they explained that the young researchers were well informed about their own lives and the research tools and methodologies they provided just facilitated the process. This, however, was not considered self-research but a more generalised research as they were not researching about their own lives but the lives of other children and young people. The new data gathered from the respondents they interviewed were analysed based on the premise that the children and young people are experts on their lives and best positioned to offer information about the issues that affect them. In a similar vein, Tisdall (2016) argues that by perceiving children and young people as potential experts and creators of knowledge, opportunities are created to provide them with a place in decision-making, legitimatising their expertise and experiences. Likewise, Fern and Kristinsdóttir (2011) point out that children and young people are the people with the most knowledge and expertise about research topics pertaining to issues they face, so they must be involved in research in an active way, either as research subjects or direct researchers.

Staff members at the two case studies agreed that the children and young people pose a well-developed knowledge on the issues that mattered to them and their peers and they bring rich personal experiences and expertise to the research. This recognition and conceptualisation from staff members was essential in support of the children and young people's engagement in the research projects as they were treated as knowledgeable and competent people able to conduct research. Mayall (2000) argues that a major sign of change is the increasing recognition of children and young people as social actors with knowledge and perspectives that should be

studied and included in policy and decision-making. However, as one practitioner in this study described, there are still some ambiguities regarding this position, in which some adults, professionals and decision makers are resistant to recognise the expertise of children and young people. They, however, have less opposition to value the experiences of children and young people. This reflects some of the struggles that feminist research faced when confronting traditional research and validate women's experiences and expertise, and placing them as centre of the creation of knowledge (Rayaprol, 2016). This approach generated initial resistance and was largely ignored, but with time feminist perspectives shaped social research by addressing power relations and making visible the experiences and expertise of vulnerable and excluded populations (Connolly, 2008). Similarly, Oliver (1997) argues that before the emergence of emancipatory research methodologies, the experiences of disabled people were disregarded by academics that frequently abstracted and misrepresented disability issues. Emancipatory research enabled people with disabilities to redefine these issues and contribute to change research paradigms by placing them and their experiences in the centre of the research process in order to generate knowledge.

Taken as a whole, this research shows that children and young people's expertise and experience are recognised as a critical component of their participation and contribution to the research. This expertise and experience offers alternative children and young people's views and perspectives on their lives, which can look very different from an adult perspective. This, however, raises the question as to whether children and young people are capable of generating concrete knowledge

by conducting their own research rather than just collaborating on different phases of a research process.

### **5.3.2 Generating knowledge through child-led research**

Fern and Kristinsdóttir (2011) argue that there is recognition that children and young people are experts on their lives and consequently are able to participate in different research phases and contribute to the understanding of complex issues by drawing on their experience. Furthermore, existing studies document contributions from children and young people's personal experiences to research projects, as well as their competence in actively generating knowledge (e.g. Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Hampshire et al., 2011; Mason and Hood, 2011; Kim, 2016). Hampshire and colleagues (2011) summarise:

It is now commonly accepted (in theory at least) by researchers and other organisations that children are not merely passive recipients of adult knowledge, but actively create, interpret and produce meanings, understandings and 'knowledge'. (Hampshire et al., 2011, p219)

As Hampshire and colleagues argue, there is a supported view that children and young people are creators of knowledge who are capable of comprehending the reality in which they live and produce knowledge based on their own experiences. This position has been embraced in literature that recognises children and young people as experts on their own lives, acquiescing that they are well-qualified to engage in or conduct research connected to their daily life experiences (Mason and Danby, 2011). This brings to the discussion the meanings of knowledge and research.

As outlined in the literature review chapter, Berger and Luckmann (1968) point out that the analysis of knowledge is related to understanding the social construction of reality; consequently, within societies there exist a variety of types of knowledge. Regarding the sources of knowledge, Csiernik and Birnbaum (2017) state that scientific research knowledge is the outcome of a scientific process, which differ from naturalistic knowledge such as tradition and experience. In this context, scientific knowledge looks for evidence to explore and understand reality through a research process, which aims to acquire specific types of information using queries, which, in conjunction with the research purpose, identify and produce a particular form of knowledge that researchers aim to uncover (Blaikie, 2009). Regarding the question if children and young people could create knowledge, Breitbart (2003) argues that there are multiple ways to generate knowledge, including the knowledge generated by ordinary people that are able to produce data based on their own experiences and the access they have to simple methodologies to capture and analyse information. However, this position requires further exploration in order to determine how children and young people generate knowledge in research, including critical considerations such as ethics and methodologies. For Törrönen and Vornanen (2014), ethics and methodology are essential features in research, but they also indicate that it is central to this research process the rich information that the multiple experiences that children and young people bring to the research process, which represent an added value.

Staff members argued that the young researchers brought to light problems considered less relevant for adults within the communities (e.g. bullying) as the



research by adults was focused on topics considered more urgent such as health, labour and security. With the new knowledge, they wanted to take action and promote change in policy and practice. When I asked how this knowledge was generated, the children and young people in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case explained that they first used their own experiences to understand what was happening with refugee children at schools and then expanded the breadth of evidence by engaging about 120 children and young people as respondents. Abdulla, an 18-year-old participant in Lebanon, noted, “We used questionnaires to interview other children to understand the reality where we live and the problems we face as refugees”.

As Abdulla mentioned, young researchers conducted a process in which they explored issues that affected them by collecting and analysing data obtained from children and young people who were also refugees. This information was then used to better understand the situation they and other children and young people were enduring. When Abdulla used the pronoun ‘we’ in his sentence to refer to ‘where we live’ and ‘we face’, he meant that they researched issues relating to their own lives as refugees. The children and young people put themselves in the centre of their research by reflecting on their own experiences while analysing the data. This resonates with discussions in Chapter 2, literature review, that emphasise that knowledge can also be produced by all individuals who are able to formulate their own particular views on the issues they experience in their lives, without being part of research institutions, as they contribute with their rich experiences to the research process (Cahill, 2007). However, as Ansell and colleagues (2012) warn that it is critical to ensure that this knowledge generation is not solely based on the personal

experience of the young researchers, but built in the multiple experiences of research participants. Young researchers in both case studies included a large number of research participants and produced data that then were complemented by their own individual stories. This means that their personal experiences were reflected in the data collected from the other children and young people they interviewed. The young researchers positioned themselves within the research project and include their personal experiences and views to comprehend the issues they want to study.

By reflecting on their own lives, the young researchers made clear that they were not examining the data as outsiders; on the contrary, they explored the issues from their personal perspectives, using their individual experiences to understand the topics under examination and presented new insights. This complex process generated new knowledge that contributed to the comprehension of the children and young people's discourses and how they positioned themselves within the refugee situation. Pillow (2003) argues that reflexivity is a useful methodological tool that assists researchers to carry out a process of self-awareness to acknowledge their own subjectivities and how these can affect the research process. From interviews, it seems that young researchers went through a similar process. However, as the young researchers did not document this reflection process, there is no clarity about which views were included or excluded, which brings some questions about possible factors that could bias the results of their research projects.

In the *Dhaka* case, children and young people generated new knowledge about the ways in which community members understood the birth registration process and the negative implications that the lack of birth registration had on

children's well-being. They discovered that approximately 47% of children and young people in their community were not registered at birth because many families do not register their children due to lack of knowledge about the registration procedure or in order to avoid sending their children to school. A lack of registration opened the possibility for parents to change the year of birth their children, so they could engage in labour or marry them off while still younger than the minimum marriageable age (Excerpt from field notes, 14 May 2016). Children and young people articulated that they collected data from 300 people and then analysed the information by reflecting on their own experiences and perspectives. They argued that it was very important to value and include the views of all the people surveyed in their research, including their own perspectives. This process generated new and rich information that was contrasted with other studies conducted by NGOs and the government in order to identify the gaps between their own child-led research and the ones conducted by others. For instance, young researchers claimed that they found inconsistencies in the number of children without birth certificates between the government reports (20%) and their own child-led research findings (47%).

Interview data from this study suggested that the new information acquired by the young researchers was possible due to a co-construction process where the different forms of expertise and experience were respected amongst the young researchers, interviewees and adult facilitators. Children and young people reported that they did not feel confident at the beginning of the research project to analyse the data collected as they thought it was a very complex process and did not want to omit or exclude any view from the evidence. However, with the support of the adult

facilitator, they started to cluster the themes and distinct patterns began to emerge. Their own experience and expertise were essential factors in the data analysis and they discovered new information as a result of the collaborative construction of knowledge by all research participants. This is consistent with evidence from other studies that demonstrate when children and young people engage at different stages of a research project they convey new perspectives that can change the research outcomes based on their first-hand experiences as the main contributors of knowledge generation, mainly challenging adults' interpretation of their worlds (Fleming, 2011; Manson and Danby, 2011; Shier 2015).

Yet, the engagement of adult facilitators in supporting the young researchers raised questions about their levels of influence in knowledge generation and how this affected the children and young people's positions in the research. Young researchers at the two case studies contended that the adults only enable their learning of data analysis techniques and noted that the adult facilitators did not interfere in the analyses of the data, instead guiding them to understand the process. Interviews with the adult facilitators show some evidence that they influenced the way children and young people analysed the data by offering different perspectives of how they could explain a situation. This was part of the co-construction of knowledge where adult facilitators were not the final decision makers but acted as contributors at different levels.

Children and young people articulated that the process of knowledge generation is possible through use of an adequate methodology that includes the sample determination, the appropriate selection of methods to collect data and the

necessary tools for analysing the information gathered. Piyal, a staff member from Bangladesh, explained that young researchers learnt research skills and followed a good process that made the research project suitable to their abilities. This suggests that when children and young people are supported and equipped with the necessary skills and tools, they are able to generate suitable knowledge and a better understanding of how they construct their social contexts and the issues that affect them.

Building on their ability to generate knowledge, young researchers emphasised that, aside from the methodology, the other factor that facilitates the procurement of new and rich information is the use of the peer-to-peer approach, in which they can have access to their peers and increase the likelihood to get responses from participants. This implies that children and young people generate specific knowledge that adult researchers might not be able to access in the same way because young researchers are able to connect directly with their peers and understand how they live their lives on a daily basis and what is important to them. The young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study argued that they had a unique opportunity to connect with their peers in a non-intrusive way and were able to produce useful data that mirrored their experiences as refugees, especially around sensitive issues such as violence, bullying and harassment. During interviews, young researchers revealed that many children and young people, as well as they themselves, did not want to talk to adults about violence at school for fear of reprisals. According to their accounts, the child-led research opened a safe space where respondents felt that they were able to share this information in a sensitive

and ethical way. The data collected from the interviews interacted with the children and young people's own experiences as refugees and were analysed and revisited in order to make sense and produce evidence that accurately reflects the data gathered. Consistently, Törrönen and Vornanen (2014) found in their study that young researchers have the ability to engage meaningfully with the research participants by establishing relations of mutual trust with their peers and embracing sympathy with those who have faced similar experiences.

However, a challenge that remains unanswered is how the power differences between children and young people as researchers and children and young people as interviewees affect the knowledge generation and the possible exclusion of some views or experiences. The young researchers expressed their commitment to address inequality in participation and said they tried to achieve as many perspectives as possible within the limitations of their research project. Young researchers claimed that they were very careful to include all of the views and stressed that they put forth special effort to reach the most vulnerable people in order to avoid their exclusion from the process. However, as Hampshire and colleagues (2011) point out, there is a risk that the nature of knowledge produced from child-led research might highlight particular representations while hiding others. As signalled by scholars, another risk is that the knowledge produced by the young researchers themselves can be highlighted simply as children and young people's views while not presenting the diversity of experiences and lives that others have (James, 2007). This resonates with Konstantoni's (2012) findings in her research in the UK where she found that children and young people can be involved in exclusionary practices based on age, gender and

ethnicity that can ignore some other views on the ground of being different or present diverse views.

When I asked the children and young people about these possible risks, they noted that they are also from the same vulnerable population (i.e. refugees in a host country and children from poor and deprived families); thus, they were strongly committed to make the views of other children and young people known through their research projects. They said that they want to use this opportunity to raise the perspectives of all children and young people who participated in the research and influence those with power with the knowledge they generated to improve the lives of all children, not just their own lives. From this data, it was evident that there was an awareness of possible omissions of certain views, but several questions remain unanswered regarding inclusion, such as how they ensured that they had access to the most marginalised and how they included hidden or opposing views.

### **5.3.3 Section conclusion**

This section discussed whether children and young people generate knowledge through their child-led research projects. While the recognition of children and young people as experts on their lives is widely accepted in childhood literature, knowledge generation in research remains contested (Hordijk and Baud, 2006; Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008; Ansell et al., 2012; Porter et al., 2012). This section contributes to addressing the second question which focused on exploring the claim that child-led

research is an appropriate approach to enable the generation of new knowledge and to use the findings to influence decision-making in order to lead to a change.

In the two cases studies, children and young people acted as researchers and claimed their research generated knowledge that provided them with the opportunities to be heard and potentially have an impact on decision-making around issues relevant to them. This section explored how children and young people brought their experience to the research processes and how this was consequently embedded in knowledge creation. Based on the findings of this project, young researchers' engagement in generating knowledge through child-led research was connected to three enabling factors: having capacity building, using appropriate methodologies and ensuring that all views were included.

## **5.4 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter discussed the processes of child-led research in which children and young people from the *Bekaa and Irbid* and *Dhaka* case studies engaged, from elaborating the research questions to data collection to disseminating their findings. This chapter contributed to answer Question 2: What are the processes of child-led research that positively or negatively influence decision-making? The discussion acknowledged that child-led research is not a new phenomenon and that this approach has been studied and documented in the last decade. In the chapter, I discussed that one of the most challenging aspects of the child-led research process is the need to develop clear concepts that define the child-led research. From



practitioners' and children and young people's perspectives, essential features that define child-led research processes are: (a) the control that young researchers feel they have over the different phases of the research process, (b) the motivation to make a difference in their lives using their findings to influence decision-making, (c) the focus on topics that matter to them and (d) the role of adults as facilitators who assist but do not manage the young researchers.

Child-led research as a participatory approach resonates with Lundy's (2007) model for implementing Article 12 of the UNCRC, which is shaped by four interwoven constituents: space, voice, audience and influence. As discussed in the literature review chapter, these components correspond with the features of the child-led research as the young researchers consider that this approach provides them with the following: a space to get involved, a voice that enable them to express their views, an audience that listen to them and potentially they have the ability to influence decision-making by using the findings from their child-led research. Findings suggest that children and young people who carried out the child-led research projects moved away from the traditional social construct that implies that children and young people are passive subjects of research to one that recognises them as social actors and confident creators of knowledge. Children and young people's expertise and experience are recognised as a critical components of their participation and contribution to the child-led research projects. Thus, data indicated that their views and perspectives on their own lives, which can look very different from an adult perspective, could change the research outcomes based on their insights. Children and young people brought new perspectives to issues that other

research did not cover as these issues were connected to aspects of their lives that they wanted to improve. Based on the findings of this project, young researchers' engagement in generating knowledge through child-led research was connected to three enabling factors: having capacity building, using appropriate methodologies and ensuring that all views are included.

Analysis showed that the children and young people who participated in this study engaged in child-led research projects by exploring issues that have an impact on their lives based on the information they collected amongst their peers. They claimed that the child-led research brought new perspectives to their problems and they were able to define new angles on their research topics over other more widely researched topics. The knowledge produced by the young researchers is based on their direct engagement with their peers as they gave first-hand explanations of what happened to them. As a result of this new knowledge, children and young people were able to influence decision-making and use their findings to promote positive changes in their lives, while acknowledging the tension between the recognition of children and young people as creators of knowledge and rigorous research knowledge.

One of the components of the definitions outlined in this chapter show that a critical feature identified by the participants is the young researchers' motivation to make a difference in their lives using their findings to influence decision-making. This component begins to answer Question 1, which refers to the children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research. Findings from this study show that the main motivation for

children and young people to participate in child-led research is to make a difference in their lives and to bring about social justice and change. This implies that an important part of the child-led research process is to share their findings with others and put their recommendations into action in order to meet their expectations in improving their lives and communities. However, one possible objection to the significance of the motivation component is that this could be undermined if children and young people only join a research project to meet friends and learn new skills, without the will to do advocacy work beyond the project (see also Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008). This raises the concern of what happens if the research project is child-led but does not have an advocacy component. Does this mean that the research project would inevitably lose its child-led label? Is 'making a difference' the main drive for children and young people to engage in child-led research? Does 'to make a difference' define child-led research? These questions and findings on children and young people's motivation will be discussed further in Chapter Seven. The next chapter explores whether the knowledge generated by the child-led research projects have made any impact on decision-making processes as outlined as one of the main young researchers' motivations.

## CHAPTER SIX

# 6 Adopting child-led research to make an impact in decision-making

### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the different conceptualisations of child-led research and how children and young people have engaged in their own research projects in order to generate knowledge on issues that are relevant to them. In doing so, the young researchers' aim was to influence decision-making in order to contribute to changes in their lives. This chapter explores how the young researchers used the findings of their child-led research to influence decision-making. This chapter contributes to answer Question 3:

**Question 3** - In what ways does child-led research influence decision-making? (And why and how do they do so?)

Further, this chapter also discussed some aspects of Question 1 regarding children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in child-led research. In this chapter, I discuss how children and young people created a knowledge exchange strategy to disseminate their findings as a means to

strengthen their participation in decision-making processes on the issues they researched. I begin by examining the knowledge exchange plans at the two sites and the different options taken by the research participants to create research impact. The analysis then turns to the impact of the child-led research findings and how those have contributed to making a difference in policies and practices. The findings contrast the different kinds of impacts that the child-led research have within their local contexts and how they contributed to social changes according to the different contexts. As discussed in the previous chapter, the young researchers actively engaged in their research projects as a means to contribute to change and to influence those in power to make changes a reality. Lastly, I explore how the child-led research projects have contributed to changes in the personal lives of the young researchers and the organisational outcomes of the supporting organisation.

## **6.2 Measuring the impact of child-led research**

As discussed in Chapter Three, literature highlights a tension between the processes and outcomes of children and young people's participation. Opinions are divided between those who consider the process more important than the outcomes or vice versa (Hart, 1992; Thomas, 2007; Tisdall, 2014). Nevertheless, there has been an increasing interest in exploring and understanding how children and young people's participation in decision-making can be measured. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recognises, in its General Comments No. 12, that participation is an outcome as well as a set of conditions to ensure positive results for children and young people's engagement in decision-making (UN Committee on the Rights of the

Child, 2009). According to Tisdall (2014), one of the pitfalls of participatory initiatives that aim to impact on decision-making, regardless of the context where it is implemented, is “focusing on process rather than impact, so that children and young people may have positive experiences of involvement but their views have little to no impact on decision-making” (p.3). This raises questions around the balance needed between the initiatives where children and young people engage and the impact of their involvement.

From a practice perspective, Lansdown and O’Kane (2014) argue that one of the limitations of children and young people’s participation has been the lack of methodologies to measure what has been done versus what has been achieved in order to evaluate the impact of children and young people’s participation on decision-making. They point out that key components to be scrutinised are the structures, processes and outcomes. These cannot be considered isolated features when measuring the change that a project has achieved.

In the context of my study, it is critical to recognise one key aspect of impact on the child-led research projects: the changes that the child-led research made in decision-making as a result of the children and young people’s findings. This distinct component is also acknowledged by Shier (2015) when analysing children and young people’s experiences as researchers in Nicaragua. He states that in order to measure the impact of the children and young people’s research, evidence should be gathered on the impact the research findings have on influencing decision-making at the community and policy levels. Shier (2015) notes:

The challenge is to demonstrate the workings of cause and effect, from children researching social issues and generating new knowledge, to the eventual impact of that knowledge as a force for change achieved through advocacy and social action. (Shier, 2015, p217)

Based on the experience of young researchers in Nicaragua, Shier highlights that many projects fail to provide empirical evidence of the impact of child-led research in contributing to actual changes in policy and practice. The gathering of evidence on knowledge exchange is also imperative for young researchers who want to know how their research was used and understood by relevant stakeholders. This resonates with Lundy's (2007) model that includes 'influence' as a key component in her typology to ensure that children and young people's views are taken into account and they are informed on which decisions were made and how their recommendations were considered. Moreover, Tisdall (2013) argues that children and young people are more likely to remain engaged in participatory initiatives, such as child-led research, when they believe that there will be clear outcomes as a result of their participation. Similarly, young researchers who participated in this study pointed out that they got involved in the child-led research project as they wanted to make a change and, as Tisdall points out, they stayed engaged based on the belief their project had well-defined and achievable outcomes. However, commentators have pointed out there is still a lack of rigorous research on the outcomes of children and young people's participation projects and most of the existing evidence is more anecdotal rather than empirical (Alderson, 2008; Bessell, 2011; Sharpe, 2015).

Children and young people participating in child-led research in the two case studies covered by this research project did not develop a specific impact strategy as

part of their research project; however they did outline ideas for dissemination plans and the people they wanted to reach. While reviewing the data gathered on impact, I noticed that there are different understandings of the concept of impact between academic researchers and practitioners as well as amongst practitioners themselves. From an academic perspective, the University of York (2016) understands research impact as the influence that research has beyond academia and contribution to the health, property and well-being of people and society, such as providing the evidence base for decision-making in relation to the development of public policy for example. Impact will happen when other people take up and use the research so that something changes.

From a practice perspective, World Vision UK (2014) defines impact as the “significant or sustainable change in people’s lives brought about by a given action or series of actions” (p.10). The change is measured by using baseline comparisons and indicators, which reflect the changes of a programme over a specific period of time. An example of these indicators, provided by participating staff members of this study, included: (1) the number of girls and boys who develop and implement their own projects, with the appropriate partnership and support of adults and (2) the proportion of girls and boys who report that their views are sought and incorporated into the decision-making of local government. In part, the difference between the two understandings of impact is that, in the case of the practitioner, impact is connected to changes as result of programmes and projects, whereas, for an academic, impact is related to the activities undertaken by researchers to connect



their findings to stakeholders in order to create positive change based on the result of their research.

When I asked the children and young people participating in this study about their understanding of the child-led research's impact, they did not have a clear definition of impact. I then explained what impact means within a research project in simple language and they understood the concept. They already knew the meaning of the term but did not articulate it using the word impact. A Bangladeshi girl, Gita, aged 16, explained impact as: "Our research found the problems and now we need to see how the government is going to resolve them." Dalia, aged 14, from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study added: "Nobody will listen to me if I am alone; however, they will listen the research we did and they can make changes we are asking." These two quotes show that for them research impact implies changes will be made in the way things work based on their findings.

Regarding the understanding of research impact in academia, Morton (2015) points out that research can be measured across three levels: research uptake, research use and research impact. Morton defines them as follow:

- Research uptake happens when people read a research report, comment on it or attend a presentation.
- Research use refers to situations when people use the research to inform a practice or policy, share it with other people, and change their understanding of an issue.
- Research impact means that the use of research contributed to change.

These three categories that assess the impact of research could also be used to explore the impact of child-led research projects according to the changes that they

have produced in awareness, knowledge, attitudes and policy and practice. The use of this typology facilitates the understanding of the impact that research has and how this is located within specific contexts, bringing into the analysis the engagement of the research users (Morton, 2015). Other studies recognise that measuring and assessing research uptake and impact is challenging, especially when changes in policy and practice are not easily attributed to a specific research project (ESRC-DFID, 2013). Morton (2015) argues that the measurement of individual research impact on policy or practice is a very complex and difficult process that first requires influencing attitudes, understanding and knowledge of the change makers. However, despite the contexts and multiple factors outside the control of a research project, a good measurement approach helps identify how research generates impact and contributes to changes at different levels (ESRC-DFID, 2013).

By applying Morton's model, the young researchers would have more tools to explore how their research have contributed to an impact in different levels, changing the lens to analyse final outcomes from attribution to contribution, recognising the presence of many factors that can influence a change (Meagher et al., 2008). Equally, Nutley and colleagues (2009) argue that research impact is a complex and multifaceted process that includes several effects such as contributing to knowledge and understanding, changing attitudes and perceptions, and influencing practice and policy change. This echoes the aims of the young researchers in the two case studies, who engaged in child-led research to make a change by generating knowledge that could lead to change in mindsets and attitudes and hopefully a transformation in policy and practice that affect them.

### 6.2.1 Child-led research's knowledge exchange strategy

As discussed in Chapter Five, the young researchers engaged in all stages of the child-led research project in the two case studies examined, however, it was unclear their participation in the knowledge exchange strategy. Such a contrast between the engagement in a research project and the knowledge exchange strategy is pointed out by Yardley (2014) who argues that children and young people's participation in research is generally well-supported and documented; however, the dissemination of the research findings, including presentations and other knowledge exchange actions, is considered less important to or less supportive for the young researchers. The next section explores whether children and young people developed a knowledge exchange strategy within their child-led projects laid out in Table 7 and how they collected information on the use and uptake of their research findings.

**Table 7 Knowledge exchange plan per case study**

<b>Actions</b>	<b><i>Bekaa and Irbid case study</i></b>	<b><i>Dhaka case study</i></b>
<b>Final report</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A research report that summarise the findings and recommendation in English and Arabic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A research report to communicate the research findings in Bengali</li> <li>• A brief version in English.</li> </ul>
<b>Events and face-to-face workshops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch event to present the research report</li> <li>• Face-to-face meetings with selected stakeholders to present the findings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch event to present the research report</li> <li>• Workshops with stakeholders and decision makers to share the research findings</li> <li>• Face-to-face meetings with selected stakeholders to ensure action and a commitment for change based on the findings</li> </ul>
<b>Social influence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short videos in YouTube to promote the research findings</li> <li>• Interviews in national television and newspapers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of the traditional media to disseminate the research findings</li> <li>• Use of social media to disseminate the findings (blogs, videos, photographs)</li> </ul>

### **6.2.1.1 Knowledge exchange strategy in the *Dhaka* case study**

According to interview data, children and young people from the *Dhaka* case study were fully engaged in the planning of a knowledge exchange strategy, including several dissemination activities intended to maximise the impact of the research. Young researchers were confident that having a good plan in place to utilise the evidence generated by their research was critical to informing changes in practice and policy around the research topics. The Bangladeshi young researchers' strategy was based on four main actions:

- Report research launching event
- Workshops with stakeholders and decision makers to share the research findings
- Traditional and social media to disseminate the research findings
- Face-to-face meetings with selected stakeholders to ensure action and a commitment for change based on the findings.

This strategy conceived by the young researchers was consistent with knowledge exchange experts who argue that it is critical to have a strategy in place in order to facilitate the selection of a target audience and identify key relevant people and issues that can influence change (Morton and Fleming, 2013). Piyal, a staff member who worked with the children and young people in Bangladesh, explained that young researchers were fully aware of the need to promote and disseminate the research findings once the final report was written. She explains:

The children were very active in disseminating their research findings. They designed a launch workshop by themselves and invited the participants they considered important, such as ministers, government officials, non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives, media, etc. They also invited their parents so they can see the results of their work. They did everything, from designing the banners to sending invitations, from hosting the event to responding to media interviews. (Piyal, staff member, *Dhaka* case study)

As Piyal described, the children and young people clearly identified the need to have a plan to share their findings and selected the appropriate audience to whom to present. The launch was done in a workshop format with panellists speaking about the research findings to more than 70 attendees, most of them from the government, human rights institutions, international development agencies, academia and local NGOs. An additional 10 representatives from the local media covered the presentation. Piyal considered the event successful in promoting the research findings at the highest level possible. She explained, “the presentation was much appreciated by all participants as this child-led research was the first of [its] type [here] and very pioneering”. While participating in the dissemination workshop, children and young people reported that they enjoyed leading the event and being the centre of attention and praise. One of the young researchers noted:

We were well prepared, so people noticed and were very respectful and supportive. We gave facts and we didn’t attack anyone [or] blame the government, and we came up with recommendations and solutions. (Fanish, aged 14, *Dhaka* case study)

Subsequent to the successful event, children and young people carried out several actions including press releases, print and radio interviews and social media updates

in an attempt to raise the public's awareness of the research findings. They also conducted sessions in schools and community centres to engage students and educational staff in their advocacy efforts. Another knowledge exchange action taken by the young researchers was the organisation of meetings with relevant government and municipality officers to present the findings and inform them of the necessary actions to address the issues uncovered by the research. One young researcher explained their approach:

We discussed how to share our findings; for example, we wanted to influence everyone from local to national levels. We used parents' meetings at schools, newspapers, radio stations and meetings with government employees. (Diya, aged 14, *Dhaka* case study)

Diya described multiple levels of actions taken to reach a wider audience as they did not want just to influence decision makers and government officials, but also wanted to raise awareness at the community level to educate and institute change on the issues researched. Amba, aged 13, built on Diya's explanations, "we went to the community to share the results with the people, and they were very interested in the results". When I asked how they delivered the information to people, Jaina, aged 15, explained that "we did some booklets with the information we collected and we distributed them in the community". The outcomes of these knowledge exchange actions will be examined in the following sections.

As Lomas (2000) points out, knowledge exchange in any research project requires time, effort and resources to ensure long-term networking. For instance, in conversation with staff members they shared their impressions about the difficulties

that children and young people could face in conducting knowledge exchange work, as this process is very time-consuming. This requires a collaborative approach with the supporting organisation in order to carry out the planned actions, access the necessary resources and reach the networks of decision makers that would be unreachable for most children and young people (Excerpt from field notes, 5 April 2016). However, the young researchers believe that it is possible to carry out knowledge exchange work without the assistance of the supporting organisation, but they agreed that this would be more limited in terms of the resources and accessibility to the people in power they want to influence.

Interview data from this study showed that the children and young people were fully assisted by their supporting organisation and provided with the means required to achieve the task. Piyal, the main staff member assisting the young researchers in their project, explained that the priority focus was keeping the entire process child-led, so the staff ensured a clear line between the logistical support that facilitators provided and the leading role that the young researchers played in the project. She added “they did absolutely all [of it], from identifying the stakeholders to preparing the brief papers for the meetings. We just opened the doors for them”.

The children and young people reported that they were satisfied with the reception of their research findings report as a whole. They felt that their findings could contribute to changes in policy and practices; however, they believed that the changes required long-term efforts as people need to understand the problems before committing to making changes. Abhoy, a young researcher, who summarised the general sense of agreement on this issue noted:

We are in halfway; we have done many things to make a change with our research, but we need to do more. I thought that our work finished with the report writing, but then we wanted to do more and more. People need to know about our findings and the government needs to change many things. (Abhoy, aged 14, *Dhaka* case study)

As Abhoy mentioned, the young researchers in Bangladesh envisioned their work as contributing to change and developed a plan of action to continue disseminating their research findings with relevant stakeholders, including an agreement with the Birth Registration Department and ongoing awareness raising sessions, up to one year after the research concluded. This resonates with Cahill's (2007) research, which shows that when people engage in any form of participatory research they are looking for space to participate and make a change that is relevant to their daily lives. Children and young people from the two case studies joined the research projects motivated by the prospect of generating knowledge and action, as they were looking to bring about changes in issues that affected them. They engaged in research as an opportunity to learn new skills and collect information that could be used to transform their communities and lives.

The knowledge exchange action plan developed by the young researchers in the *Dhaka* case study echoes Morton's typology (Morton, 2015) and its three components. For instance, regarding *research uptake*, they wanted their target audience to engage with their research throughout the use the meeting and social media. In terms of the *research use*, they aimed to encourage stakeholder and



decision makers to act upon research findings and use them to inform changes in policy and practice. Concerning *research impact*, the young researchers envisioned changes in their lives and in policy and practice as a result of their research. This will be discussed further in following sections.

#### **6.2.1.2 Knowledge exchange strategy in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study**

In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, the knowledge exchange strategy was planned differently from the Bangladeshi project due to the political context in which the children and young people conducted their research. When I asked the young researchers what their strategy was to share the research findings, they explained that they were mainly involved in media interviews and video activities to disseminate their research findings. However, they were unable to describe the different actions taken to disseminate their findings. Staff members explained that the children and young people provided general ideas for the knowledge exchange strategy, but they were not fully involved in the details. Jumanah, staff member from Lebanon, explained:

It is very important to have a dissemination strategy, and we supported the children in reaching the audience. In this case, we were more proactive with the dissemination strategy; this doesn't mean that the children do not have the capacity to engage in the dissemination strategy. Yes, they have the ability to do this but for this part, World Vision took an active role due to sensitivities around the Syria crisis and to ensure that the target audience was reached. (Jumanah, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

In this account, Jumanah recognised the pivotal importance of a knowledge exchange strategy, which can be child-led; however, she pointed out that, due to the very complex context in the host countries, they made the decision not to involve the young researchers in selecting the audience or participating directly in the presentation of the research findings. When Jumanah used the word ‘sensitivities’ in her reflection, she was referring to political and security situations, which affected the young researchers in that phase of the research project. Kamal, a Lebanese staff member, explained further:

We always include children who participated in the projects [in the dissemination]. They have a leading role: they are the hosts, they are the spokespeople, and they sit at the front table, and so on. Children have a more prominent role than adults. But this case was different. This is a conflict situation; a war in the next-door country, the refugee situation is a big and a controversial issue in the country. It was not possible for us to secure the children’s safety; because of this we had an alternative plan. (Kamal, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

As Kamal noted, the political situation in the host countries was tense and critical to the refugee population; so the staff members decided, after a reflexive process carried out by staff members that comprised of a risk assessment, not to include children and young people in the research findings’ presentation event. The risks were around the nationality of the young researchers who were all Syrian refugees, which implies more risks of commuting to the capital city, as they did not have legal residence papers. Staff mentioned that the young researchers were not included in this decision. This decision raises some concern about the tension between

participation of children and young people and their protection. Caputo (2017) argues that relationships between the rights to protection and participation are challenging, but protection efforts should not restrict children and young people's participation, and they should be engaged in decisions in order to make these efforts collaborative rather than imposed. When I asked about the alternative plan they arranged, Kamal explained that the young researchers recorded a video summarising the key findings. This video was screened during the report launch event.

The decision not to have the young researchers present at the launch event was understandable and reasonable in the circumstances; however, this raises the question of whether adult facilitators should not have prevented the children and young people from designing the knowledge exchange plan? As the project describes its approach as child-led, it can be argued that the lack of children and young people's engagement in one of the critical stages, dissemination, has undermined the nature of the child-led practice. That said, Lundy and colleagues (2011) argue that the ideals of the conceptualisation of children and young people require flexibility as young researchers will not always make all decisions as the adult researchers are at times required to follow regulations or demands from funders or partner agencies. When I asked staff members about the perceived lack of engagement, Kamal noted:

They [the children and young people] brainstormed about the best way to disseminate the research findings. For instance, they wanted to conduct some community campaigns, write letters to decision makers and do plays and performances. Unfortunately, due to the political and security situation, we could not do that. We focused just on media work and sending the report to key people inside and outside the country. (Kamal, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

This account reflects that a staff member made efforts to engage the young researchers in the dissemination phase; however, they explained that the protection mandate of the supporting organisation was determinant in changing the approach. This means that when faced with security risk the activities that involve children and young people must be postponed or cancelled. Another staff member from Lebanon responded:

We need to remember that this was a joint project between children and World Vision. World Vision invited the children to be part of the third year anniversary [of the war in Syria], and World Vision took one part of the project, for instance, facilitation and dissemination and children took the other part, such as data collection, analysis, writing up, etc. The separation of roles did not undermine the nature of child-led research. This was still child-led research. (Jumanah, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

As Jumanah signalled there was a division of responsibilities and the organisation kept the dissemination role for their staff as they considered it appropriate due to the political complexities in Lebanon and Jordan. As Jumanah pointed out, they also took an opportunistic approach in order to maximise the chances around the commemoration of the Syria crisis. She noted that “we had particular events and we wanted to use the momentum of the report and we knew which audience and individuals were more relevant”. As this project was a collaboration, World Vision took a more leading role in the dissemination in order to ensure that the research were seen by relevant stakeholders who could influence or make decisions on the

refugee situation highlighted in the child-led research. In the same vein, a staff member who supported the international distribution of the research report noted:

Children themselves defined a broader audience, as the aim of this research was to reach decision makers on the war in Syria. However, we cannot expect that children know exactly the names of the decision makers. It was my responsibility to define who the audience at the New York level were. (Susan, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, based in United States)

Staff members in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study endorsed the rationale developed by Susan. They pointed out that children and young people did not have specific information of the context in terms of the people they wanted to influence. According to staff members, the young researchers were aware of the broader roles but they could not articulate specific names or institutions they wanted to reach and influence. However, one could argue that the staff could have given the information to them about the key decision makers that the young researchers could influence. In comparing the *Bekaa and Irbid* case with the *Dhaka* one, the dissemination phase was very different from the Bangladesh experience, where children and young people lived locally and exposed to people in power and had a clear understanding of the structures and easy access to decision makers through World Vision's long-time support.

During interviews, when I asked staff members in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study if they would make the same decision regarding the knowledge exchange strategy in a future project with young researchers, all said that they would change this approach and make more effort to engage fully the children and young people

in the dissemination phase. One staff member who engaged in the international dissemination of the research findings reflected:

The children were unfortunately not involved in the dissemination [of the research findings]. They were consulted after the fact with what we intended to do with the research. I do agree that we chronically underestimate children's perceptions and their perspective. There are many things that can be improved. (Marie, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

This critical reflection was shared by several staff members who believed that this approach could be improved in future initiatives as they learned that the dissemination phase requires the same level of engagement from children and young people as other stages of the research process. The knowledge exchange strategy developed for the child-led research in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study was based in an adult-led multi-strand approach to reach large and diverse audiences. This included publication of the research findings report in English and Arabic, creation of a PDF version of the report for online distribution, high-level presentations at a well-renowned university in Beirut, face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders to present the research reports, engagement with international and local media, promotion of the research findings on a website platform, web conference presentations of the research findings to practitioners, major NGOs, UN agencies and other key stakeholders. World Vision staff members in New York, Brussels and Geneva disseminated the research report within their own audiences in line with the events to observe the third anniversary of the war in Syria. This included press releases, one-on-one meetings and content including photos and videos. The active

engagement of international staff members in the dissemination of the child-led research might pose some challenges in terms of the understanding the essence of a child-led process. Similarly, Kellett (2005) argues that it is pivotal to look critically at the knowledge exchange strategies and examine the degree to which adult support could become manipulative or agenda-driven. Furthermore, other authors argue that it is important to analyse whether the adults acted on behalf of children and young people in the policy arena in deciding the audience according to their own agenda, reducing children and young people's opportunities to interact with stakeholders within an open dialogue approach (Franks, 2011; Yardley, 2011; Wyness, 2013). Furthermore, Tisdall (2016), when analysing children and young people's participation in co-production, argues that opportunities need to be created to provide young participants with the space to engage directly in decision-making instead of just being represented by others as these might have a direct and positive impact in final outcomes. In the same vein, my professional experience during the last 25 years of engaging children and young people in high-level policy debates has shown me that when stakeholders and decision makers engage directly with children and young people the chances to be heard and influence others increase as these direct dialogues build trust and confidence that children and young people are conveying their own ideas and not from others.

Staff members interviewed agreed on the view that children and young people must be facilitated and supported to gain direct access to those whom they want to influence to reach their objective of a contribution to change. However, they also insisted that the complexities of social and political contexts must be taken into

account to ensure the safety of all participants. Staff members argued that one of the main objectives of the child-led research was to influence those with power, and young researchers were unable to do it on their own, so they required support to gain access to those whom they could present their research findings and advocate for changes in their situation.

According to staff members, the large audience showed the increasing importance that stakeholders give children and young people's participation, especially as the child-led research is a new approach in the international development and humanitarian response field. Kamal noted:

In the context of Syrian children, there were many reports done by adults, but I believe this was the first ever child-led research in a large emergency context. When the report was launched, many people came to the launch event. Many of them were already exposed to child-led initiatives, so they were much open to listening to children and took this report seriously. They really care about the things children want to say. (Kamal, staff member, Lebanon)

As Kamal reflected, staff members confirmed that the reception was very positive and the research findings had some level of impact on the people based on their existing interest in what children and young people say. However, Kamal clarified later in the interview that the interest of people in the child-led research as a captivating process does not mean that people will make decisions based on the young researchers' findings and recommendations. Similarly, Jumanah, another staff member, argued that a final outcome of change is very difficult to measure but believes that the child-led research is an approach that generates attention and the



launch event was a strategic opportunity to discuss the Syria crisis from children and young person's perspectives and gain wide media exposure. She added that "the child-led research was fundamental in generating a debate on the situation of refugees after three years of war in Syria". Joumanah pointed out a very interesting perspective of one of the aims of children and young people's participation programmes within international development field, in which the child-led research was developed and implemented: transformative participation. This concept can be understood as the transformation of institutional practices, social norms and capacity gaps that cause social exclusion (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Findings from this study show that the child-led research project was a useful tool to promote debates and changes in attitudes regarding the issues investigated by the young researchers. However, the process to transform society is complex and as Tisdall (2013) argues, children and young people's participation could be a powerful tool to change social relations and practices but it is not powerful enough to transform institutions as a whole without considering pivotal factors such as place and context.

### **6.2.2 Section conclusion**

This section examined the research participants' perceptions of the knowledge exchange strategies and how those were developed in the two cases studies. There were areas of tension between staff members and children and young people in their understandings of the responsibilities and roles in disseminating the child-led research findings. The chapter examined the different approaches taken by both case studies regarding the young researchers' engagement in the dissemination phase.

For instance, staff members in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study were concerned about child protection issues and the lack of knowledge that the young researchers had on the local context, while the young researchers in the *Dhaka* case study had the control of their knowledge exchange plan. The analysis of these examples echoes the suggestion of Caputo (2017) that it is important to create spaces for dialogue to engage children and young people in determining protection strategies, including debate around issues such as power, competence and experience. What is useful from Caputo's argument is the need for ongoing reflection between the understanding of children and young people as object of protection or subject of rights and a critical analysis on "the ways power works at the intersection of protection in dynamic contexts is necessarily directed towards a broader ground of participation" (p.87). In touching on Question 1, regarding motivations for and expectation of the young researchers, findings show that the main motivation of the young researchers was to contribute to a changes in policy and practice, especially around issues affecting their lives. They joined the child-led research projects motivated by the prospect of learning something new, creating new knowledge and planning for action, as they aimed at addressing issues they considered unfair. Furthermore, they also wanted to raise awareness at the community level and educate their peers on their findings, as they were aware that changes require collective and long-term efforts. The next section explores whether the child-led research projects made an impact on the issues that the young researchers wanted to change.

### 6.3 Child-led research impact on decision-making processes

According to many of the research participants who were interviewed in this project, one of the main motivations of the young researchers and the objectives of the child-led research in the case studies was to collect evidence to influence decision-making and contribute to changes in children and young people's lives. Respondents indicated that one of the achieved outcomes of the child-led research was the access that the young researchers had to stakeholders and decision makers when presenting their research findings reports personally or through representatives. Interview data from this study suggest that the wide distribution of the reports facilitated access to the findings for a broad audience. In particular, it was noted that many of the people who referenced the findings reports were not included as possible research users. For instance, staff members indicated that high-level officers from United Nations and NGOs mentioned the child-led research report in conversations and meetings but they were not in the initial distribution list. They had access to the report via other people, media outlets or from websites where the reports were uploaded.

Although the reports were successfully circulated, interviewees in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study argued that, despite the collective achievements of the young researchers, there were significant restrictions regarding the impact they could have on decision-making processes. Children and young people mentioned that they were acknowledged and congratulated for being part of the child-led research, but they did not find robust evidence that their recommendations were taken into account by

the decision makers they wanted to influence. Despite this recurrent feeling of frustration amongst the young researchers in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, most of the adult respondents who supported the dissemination of the child-led research reports highlighted that this initiative changed the mindsets of many decision makers and stakeholders. For instance, staff members reported that decision makers and stakeholders told them that they highly value the input provided by the young researchers in their research projects. They said they were touched by their findings and promised to take actions within their levels of authority. They recognised that they have changed their perceptions about the lack of abilities of children and young people to carry out research and they are using the child-led research findings in their work.

Staff members, however, emphasised that a change in mindset did not imply that the child-led research findings were taken into account in decision-making processes. As a staff member who helped to disseminate the child-led research from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study internationally noted:

It is hard for me to say that this report had a direct impact on decisions that were taken by the [UN] Security Council, but I would definitely say I believe it had an indirect impact in the sense that it was part of a number of reports from civil society groups that were pushing the agenda of the Security Council. We used the report [written by children and young people] to progress several conversations at the same time. The children were telling us what needed to happen. (Susan, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, based in United States)

In this account, Susan, a staff member who manages high-level policy external engagement, described a common understanding amongst professionals engaged in

child-led research that the findings were used by a number of relevant stakeholders, and this uptake contributed indirectly to some changes, but those impacts could not be attributed directly to the child-led research results. A staff member in Lebanon, Jumanah, agreed with the assessment of the international impact of the child-led research. She explained that the strategy developed by World Vision in conjunction with the young researchers was intended to influence external governments and illustrate to global leaders how the Syrian crisis has an impact on the lives of refugee children in their host countries and what children have to say about it. Jumanah expanded further:

A policy decision was made in the United States Senate, and one of the Senators referenced this report. In Canada, one of the politicians wrote a blog on the Syrian crisis and included a link to the child-led report. The report touched many decision makers. (Jumanah, staff member, Lebanon)

As Jumanah mentioned, the report appeared to change stakeholders' perceptions of the child refugee situation and was used in multiple policy debates. Despite the fact it did not make a change in way expected by the young researchers, the report written by them was valued and was given praise by being quoted and referred to at such a high level. Thus, it probably was a change – just not the one the young researchers hoped for. Additionally, Jumanah suggested that one of the quick wins was the recommendations for action included by the young researchers that contributed to a better use of the research report in advocacy plans developed by World Vision to raise awareness on the situation of Syrian refugee children in the host countries. The young researchers' recommendations were included in World

Vision's policy and advocacy appeals due to their quality and relevance. The staff member reflected further:

Generally speaking, by far, at least for the reports in which I have been engaged, this is the report that has attracted the most attention because this is a genuine and a very powerful report. (Jumanah, staff member, Lebanon)

Similarly, another staff member from Jordan, Marie, revealed that the report written by the children and young people in Jordan had an impact on allowing children and young people from extremely vulnerable contexts to reach decision makers and share with them their findings and recommendations for action, in addition to demonstrate that they were able to engage in a sophisticated process of data collection and analysis. From a broader knowledge exchange literature, Bullock and Hughes (2016) argue that researchers generally conduct three types of knowledge exchange activities, which are people-based (e.g. attending conferences and participating in networks), problem-solving (e.g. providing informal advice and consultancy services) and community-based (e.g. lectures for the community and school projects). While analysing the young researchers' strategies, they used these three approaches to a certain extent. The young researchers from the *Dhaka* case study organised a research report launch, had meeting with their existing networks, delivered speeches to disseminate their findings and sent copies of the reports to key stakeholders (people-based). They provided advice to relevant parties on the issues studied (problem-solving) and disseminated their findings using arts, cultural and school activities (community-based). Young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid*

case study only used high-level meetings with stakeholders and media interviews to disseminate their findings (people-based). They did not use the other two approaches based on an organisational decision to protect them from any potential risk. Findings from this study show that one of the key successful factors of the knowledge exchange strategy was the active interaction between the young researchers and the public and targeted audience of the research, especially in the launch events, high-profile meetings and engagement with the media. This, however, was different between the *Bekaa and Irbid* and *Dhaka* case studies, in which the former had more successful engagement according to the research participants and resulted in more tangible outcomes than the latter. The involvement between the young researchers and research users resonates with knowledge exchange literature that confirm that the more exchange activities between researchers and research users more options for the research to be known and used, as research users embrace this new information by engaging with the researchers in a direct way and including their own perspectives to the research disseminated (e.g. Williams, 2004; Meagher et al., 2008; Boaz et al., 2009). A staff member from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, Marie, noted:

In terms of the children's ability to articulate those things, it was a surprise for many stakeholders. But it also confirmed a lot of the policies that they [the stakeholders] were pursuing themselves, so that gave them [the children and young people] extra leverage. They now have an additional resource to reinforce the issues they were talking about. (Marie, staff member, Jordan)

As Marie described, the research findings opened new spaces for children and young people to be heard at high-level political debates where traditionally their views are

excluded. The young researchers impressed the audience with a quality report, and received positive feedback from the attendees. Marie also pointed out that many of the peers NGOs were a bit incredulous that children and young people were able to write a research report. She added “this is surprising, especially when it comes from child-focused NGOs”. Marie mentioned that one of the factors that enabled impact and added value was the surprise that the child-led research produced in the audience. This novelty feature raises the questions: What will happen when this approach becomes more commonplace?

All staff members from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study reported they received positive and encouraging comments from UN agencies, especially the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UNICEF, government officials, media and from a number of major donor agencies in the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union. However, despite the positive outcomes highlighted by staff members, children and young people had differing views regarding the impact of their child-led research on decision-making and the improvement of the refugees’ conditions in host communities. Interview data from this study found that the young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study were disappointed with the minimal impact that their research made on improving their situations as refugees. Ali, a young researcher living in a refugee camp in Jordan, complained, “our report did not achieve anything. Our country is destroyed.” This sentiment of disappointment contrasts with interviews in Bangladesh where children and young people were more positive about the impact of their child-led research as they saw tangible outcomes such as the inclusion of their research findings in ongoing



governmental and parliamentary discussions on the issues they raised and the establishment that joint action plans with government officials based on the results of their child-led research. These positive and negative sentiments show how important it was for children and young people to have a tangible impact of their research and how their findings supported some changes in their lives. Abdulla, a young refugee based in Lebanon, described a general feeling amongst his peers:

We said in the beginning that we wanted to see changes, but our reality did not change at all. But now when I look back at the things we wrote, some few things have improved, but those changes are due to time and not due to the report. The time passed, and we have adapted to the situation, even the Lebanese people have adapted to us. We are used to the situation. The report did not change anything. (Abdulla, aged 18, Lebanon)

Abdulla and other young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study joined the research project with high expectations, but were less confident about the impact their research had on people with the power to address the issues they investigated. They argued that some of them now lived in better conditions, but this was not as a result of their report, and other situations, such as violence and harassment at school, remained the same. Hanadi, another young researcher, built on Abdulla's reflection:

When we were writing the report, I did not expect too many things but [I hoped] at least to do something that can touch people's hearts, their feelings. I wrote a quote and felt this quote touched me, and I was sure that it could touch other people. I expected that this small paragraph would touch people, but I do not believe it made a change in our lives. However, I am not giving up; I am still optimistic. (Hanadi, aged 16, Lebanon)

Hanadi recognised that the chance to conduct research was a space to be heard and sensitise people about their struggles. This child-led research project also provided some hope and joy in their daily lives while coping with the stressful refugee conditions. However, despite this opportunity, Hanadi and Abdulla were less positive about the impact of their research findings on the decision-making around issues relevant to them, such as ending the war in Syria and reducing violence at school. They were unable to see tangible results in their lives. Hanadi expressed frustration because she thought that her contribution to the research, especially the appealing quote she wrote by herself, did not “touch people’s hearts” as she expected. However, Hanadi did not know that this quote was used several times in international forums and conferences and reproduced in blogs and newspapers according to World Vision media staff, including the PR Newswire and the Christian Post, a leading online Christian news publication in the United States (Appendix I).

This situation reflects one of the major criticisms to children and young people's participation, which is the lack of feedback from organisations and adults who engage in dialogue with them. Hanadi's case showed that children and young people were not provided with feedback, and they were unaware how their ideas or recommendations had been used. Martin and colleagues (2015) argue that many children and young people face lack feedback on the impact of their work, which for many implies a restriction to participation. Similarly, Davis (2009) points out that absence of response or reaction causes disappointment in children and young people, especially when their ideas or requests are ignored.

While conducting this study, I learned during interviews with research participants that the child-led research findings presented by the Syrian refugee children from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study were very popular amongst international development officers and UN officials. Thus, in one of the focus group sessions with the children and young people, I decided to provide the feedback they lacked and explained to them how stakeholders and decision makers used their research findings and how people around the world were aware of their project and how it would have an impact on their perceptions of the refugee situation in Jordan and Lebanon. The young researchers were incredulous at the beginning; they claimed I was just trying to please them, but I then showed them some newspapers, websites and extracts from interviews confirming what I explained. They were happily surprised, impressed and touched by the reaction of people in other countries. However, they again clarified that their lives had not changed at all, their findings had not led to any improvements in their situation and their recommendations were not taken into account. This reflection raises questions about how to improve feedback mechanisms, how to ensure that young researchers have reasonable expectations of the outcomes of their research projects and how to explain research in such a way that it does not create unrealistic hopes of change. Perhaps, it is also an indication that more focus needs to be given to securing commitments to local changes.

While comparing the scope of the child-led research done in Bangladesh, the research topics in the *Bekaa and Irbid* study were broad and covered a vast array of respondents' perceptions on issues from war to child labour and political turmoil to

bullying at school. This maybe raised the expectations of the young researchers regarding the changes they would make and consequently brought a feeling of disappointment, as they did not perceive the changes. Contrastingly, in the *Dhaka* case, young researchers focused on one particular topic in a narrow geographical area. According to interview data collected during this project, restricting the topic facilitated the dissemination of the findings and the agreement by government officials and other stakeholders to use the research findings and committed to concrete actions for change.

Another difference that interview data showed was that children and young people in the *Dhaka* case study developed their own media action plan to reach editors and journalists to promote their child-led research as part of their knowledge exchange strategy. Children and young people in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study were supported by World Vision to be interviewed by television channels and newspapers. Young researchers stated that the media interviews were a very positive experience and gave them the opportunity to showcase their work and call for recommendations for actions. The young researchers identified the media as key powerful players in helping them enhance the impact of their research by interviewing them and passing the information about their research to the decision makers. They used TV interviews and short video clips uploaded to YouTube to promote their findings. This reflects guidelines developed by research institutions that encourage researches to pay attention to the media, one of the routes of knowledge exchange, as an effective way to reach a broader audience, ranging from decision makers to the general public (University of York, 2015; The University of Nottingham, 2016).

When I asked the children and young people from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study about specific actions or results from their research project, they mentioned that a visit from the German Foreign Affairs Minister was one moment when they felt confident that their research would make an impact. Tahirah, aged 13, a young researcher based in Lebanon noted: “After raising our voices to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Steinmeier, I felt this is the way to help children and to put a smile in their lives”.

As Tahirah mentioned, the children and young people met the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Steinmeier, during one of his visits to Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. According to staff members, Mr Steinmeier received the report written by the young refugees, and was so impressed with the report that he requested a meeting with the young researchers. The Minister’s agenda was prepared months in advance, but he required that his schedule include a visit with the writers of the research report. Four of the young researchers met Mr Steinmeier in a refugee tent in the Bekaa Valley; they had 10 minutes to present their report and exchange ideas with the minister. A staff member explained:

The site visit was a very intimidating situation, a lot of security people, media, very important people and the minister. [It was] very intimidating for adults, too. They [children and young people] did it so well because they were talking about the things they researched themselves. They owned the information. Everything they said was so natural. (Lukas, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, based in Germany)

Lukas said that Mr Steinmeier’s visit attracted enormous media attention and was carried out under strict security arrangements. The delegation included 20 journalists

that covered the conversation between the Minister and the young researchers. Interview data from my study showed that this was considered an extraordinary and unique opportunity for children and young people to share their report widely. Professionals engaged in the dissemination of the report argued that seldom has a research report attracted this type of media attention and this should be considered a significant achievement regarding the research uptake. They explained that one success factor was that the young researchers, who were from a very vulnerable population, were able to formulate and present their own ideas in an articulate way. The children and young people who met Mr Steinmeier reported that the meeting was excellent and they felt listened to, respected and valued. This resonates with Pinkney (2011) who argues that the power of personal testimony is connected to the emotional aspects of children and young people's engagement with the adult professionals who interact with them. The young researchers said that Minister Steinmeier was very enthusiastic and interested in what they said. They mentioned that one of his first questions was whether they actually wrote the report by themselves. They explained that they were not upset by the question because it was asked in a friendly and genuine way, and they immediately answered that they "wrote every word and could recite every line". However, one would wonder if an adult researcher would be asked the same question. It could be easily agreed that a question on authenticity of the authorship would be offensive or inappropriate for an adult researcher. So, this raises the query, why adults consider it appropriate to challenge the authenticity of work done by children and young people?

When I asked staff members if the commitment of Mr Steinmeier to give space to children and young people to be listened to has made an impact on the use of the child-led research and whether their recommendations were acted upon appropriately, they responded that the impact on mindsets was evident to them, but that they could not claim that any of the research recommendations were acted upon or connected to policy changes. This account reveals that one of the major difficulties with understanding and measuring the research uptake, use and impact is related to the multifaceted layers in which a research project influences decision-making processes. Morton (2015) argues that references to research and acknowledgments in interviews are partial evidence of a study's impact, but these actions need to be considered alongside other possible contributing factors, such as previous knowledge on a topic and the level of pressure from public opinion. Furthermore, studies on knowledge exchange indicates that researchers are not able to do impact; they can only take actions to ensure that their research is known by those whom they want to influence and these are the people who can potentially use the research findings to generate changes (University of York, 2015).

Interview data from this study show that the contexts in which child-led research were carried out made a difference in the way the research were used to influence decision-making. For instance, the context in Bangladesh was more conducive than Lebanon and Jordan in relation to research uptake, use and impact, as the children and young people focused on influencing local stakeholders around local issues. In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case, the local context was considered less

favourable due to sensitivities around refugees and the lack of networks of the young researchers.

In the case of Bangladesh, children and young people reported a very positive perception of the impact their research has had on its target audience. They believed that the event to launch their research findings was a success and opened more space for them to promote their findings. After the event, they arranged meetings with government officials to request an opportunity to address the issues uncovered in their research: mainly the large number of children without birth registration papers, the high fees charged for people who want to register their children after the legal deadline and the lack of understanding of the registration procedures by families. Diya, one of the young researchers, explained:

Now people are listening to children and the government is becoming keener to listen to children. We have documents that prove our findings; we shared the evidence we collected and our recommendations. (Diya, aged 14, Bangladesh)

Diya highlighted two factors that most of the children and young people signalled as critical to their research's success: the government's willingness to listen to children and young people and the evidence gathered was used as the basis of their findings and recommendations. This perception was confirmed by Bangladeshi staff members who pointed out that one of the strengths of the child-led research was that the context was conducive to supporting the fieldwork. This information was vital in opening spaces for the young researchers for dialogue on policy with decision makers. Adult interviewees explained that the use of primary data instead of



secondary made it easier for the young researchers to access government officials and media. Data presented from the children and young people's perspectives and the uniqueness of this approach grabbed the attention of their target audience. In this context, people considered the project unique as recognition of its novelty and innovative character, but also its potential replication by other groups of children and young people. Amba, a young researcher, noted:

We collected information from people and government officials. The government needs to listen to us. These are not our opinions; these are people's opinions. This is real evidence. (Amba, aged 13, Bangladesh)

Amba reinforced a shared perception amongst most of the young researchers interviewed who believed that the legitimacy of their research was rooted in the fact that they collected data directly from households and other relevant stakeholders, such as government and municipal officials. They also asserted that the information gathered was analysed thoroughly to ensure it unequivocally represented people's views. Amba, in the same line of thought as Diya, stressed her conviction that the government would listen to them and their recommendations would be acted upon.

According to staff members, this belief was accurate, and the result of new government policies that enhanced the children and young people's participation in public decision-making. A Bangladeshi staff member, Piyal, highlighted that this was probably the consequence of two factors: the enforcement of governmental policies and the quality of related participatory practices, which is consistent with a report from Save the Children, (2014) on the situation of children's rights in Bangladesh.

This report elucidates emerging changes in the attitudes of Bangladeshi decision makers towards initiatives lead by children and young people. Adult interviewees pointed out that this cultural shift has been evident over the past few years and generated a positive impact on the children and young people who have been encouraged by NGOs to engage in communications channels with decision makers.

Young researchers explained that they took the opportunities given to children and young people to participate and influence change makers seriously, and used the research findings as a platform to engage with decision makers and make their views heard on issues they consider relevant to them. A young researcher, Aalok, confirmed:

People are listening to us, and they are counting on us to do things. We are even talking with high-level people at the government. We are informing stakeholders about our work. (Aalok, aged 15, Bangladesh)

Aalok and Amba claimed that decision makers took their child-led research truthfully as they, as young researchers, felt they were the voice of the voiceless and had a responsibility to bring these issues to the decision makers to address them. They conducted several meetings with government officials to present their findings and lobby for the inclusion of their recommendations in the government's agenda. Adult and young researchers pointed out during interviews that one of the factors that facilitated the research uptake was the media coverage after the launch, which helped the children and young people disseminate their research. Staff members explained that the media was very positive with the research findings and covered it in a very respectful and professional way. One staff member noted:

The media played a significant role on the impact of the research, as they published the results and highlighted the key issues. This has had an impact. The government and stakeholders are often influenced by the media. (Suji, Staff member, Bangladesh)

As the staff member described, it was a general agreement among interviewees that the local media coverage had a positive impact on the child-led research as this was done in such a way that children and young people felt empowered. Additionally, young researchers pointed out that prior to the child-led research they already had good relationships with the local media, mainly newspapers and radio stations, in order to promote their work and raise awareness on the issues they consider relevant. They agreed that this easy access to the media was very positive in the way stakeholders perceive their work as young researchers. According to the interview data from this study, the main outcomes of the child-led research on birth registration in the *Dhaka* case study were:

- Young researchers met with the head of the Birth Registration Department who agreed to have his team use their research and institute their recommendations.
- The Birth Registration Department committed to reviewing and ensuring compliance with the current birth registration procedures that allow parents to register their child for free within 45 days of birth (their research found that people were asked for costly fees even before the end of the 45 day deadline, preventing them from registering their child).
- The young researchers worked with the registration team to develop a one-year plan to ensure that 100% of the unregistered children in the area would be registered.

Aside from the successful agreements with government officials, children and young people were convinced that the changes needed to ensure birth registration for all required a change in the mindsets of families and community leaders. In order to achieve that, their action plan included awareness sessions with community members, parents and schools. For instance, sessions for parents or community leaders who might not be able to read the report due to illiteracy or other reasons, but are interested in the issues researched by the children and young people. Young researchers also mentioned that they included in their action plan awareness raising activities in their communities using drama and songs to share the messages of their findings. They also considered dissemination of their research findings throughout Facebook and media interviews, mainly in TV, newspapers and local radio stations.

### **6.3.1 Section conclusion**

The data presented in this section has continued to answer the third research question regarding in what ways the child-led research projects influence decision-making. I examined the research participants' perceptions on the impact of the research findings and dissimilar views they had in terms of how their recommendations were taken into account by decision makers. Findings show the positive and negative sentiments around the impact of their project were connected to tangible examples of the impact of their research and how their findings supported some changes in their lives. This confirms the need to support the young researchers to set out reasonable expectations of the outcomes of the child-led research projects. The discussion highlighted the lack of feedback on how the findings were used and

the high level of hopes of the young researchers. Perceptions of success varied from one case study to another: for instance, in the *Dhaka* case study, the young researchers were very confident of the impact of their research, but in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, the young researchers were less convinced of the impact of their findings. The difference in thinking was related to the different contexts where the knowledge exchanges plans were implemented. This reflects Morton's (2015) model for knowledge exchange that emphasises that research projects, researchers and end-users need to find common grounds of connection in order to work together toward change. This is confirmed by Boaz and colleagues (2009) who argue that the more exchange activities between researchers and research users more options for the research to be known and used. For instance, Bullock and Hughes (2016) point out that these exchange activities can mainly be classified as people-based, problem solving and community-based, which indicate collaborative engagement approaches to promote the impact of the research.

#### **6.4 Child-led research impact on the individual lives of the young researchers**

The impact of participatory projects in the personal lives of the children and young people has been discussed extensively in the literature (e.g. Cornwall, 2008; Roberts and Nash, 2009; Percy-Smith, 2010; Alderson, 2012; Bucknall, 2012), identifying multiple positive benefits for the participants such as increasing confidence (Kirby and Bryson, 2002), sense of belonging (Matthews, 2003), social worth (Thomas, 2007), skills development and capacity to make a change (Tisdall, 2013).

Furthermore, studies have indicated that when children and young people engage in participatory research projects they benefit from the sense of giving something back (Skelton, 2008), learning about negotiation and power (Alderson, 2001), improving their own research skills (Newell et al., 2012) and enhancing analytical thinking (Kim, 2016).

By using the “*Learning from our experiences*” tool (adapted from Lansdown and O’Kane, 2014, Appendix E), children and young people in this research discussed their perceptions around four potential individual changes as a result of their participation in the child-led research project:

- Acquisition of skills and knowledge
- Enhanced self-esteem and self confidence
- Greater rights awareness
- Sense of efficacy and empowerment

This tool was used to stimulate conversation among the participants in order to help them to visualise their perceptions about the negative or positive outcomes of their engagement in the child-led research from an individual perspective. In terms of the impact on skills acquisition and knowledge, most of the young researchers from the two case studies felt that the child-led research was a rewarding experience where they learned new skills and tools. They rated the learning skills and knowledge as being the area with high positive impact as a result of their participation in their child-led research projects. Among the skills acquired, they mentioned writing, research, group facilitation, and negotiation skills. Amba, aged 13, a Bangladeshi young

researcher, summarised the learning they had as part of the child-led research process:

I have learned many things. I know now about how to do interviews and focus group discussions, how to communicate with policy-makers, how to collect information from policy-makers, how to get information from community members. (Amba, aged 13, *Dhaka* case study)

Amba identified the critical skills she gained to conduct their research to equip her to conduct research. Amba and her peers expressed multiple times in focus groups that they felt more confident based on the new skills and these can be easily use in other areas not only in research. This finding is consistent with Kirby and Bryson (2002) who argue that participatory initiatives provide children and young people with multiple transferable skills including decision-making, group facilitation, communication skills and teamwork. Young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study agreed that the new skills were very useful to carry out their project and were very pleased with the learning as they felt they gained new and important knowledge. Jamila described her sense of confidence based on new learnings:

The research gave me confidence, as I knew that we did the research, and we wrote the report, I felt very confident to talk about the thing we discovered; I felt even confident in giving interviews on national television. (Jamila, aged 15, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

This reflection from Jamila was shared by all of the participants as they collectively agreed that the child-led research provided skills and knowledge that they did not have before and this helped them to build a sense of assurance in their abilities. To

reaffirm this impression, Jamila added that the new skill helped her “to think in a more organised way and how to structure my ideas in an orderly way”. Data from interviews confirm that most of the young researchers from both the *Dhaka* and *Irbid and Bekaa* case studies, agreed that the child-led research helped them to develop more critical awareness about their abilities to participate in a research project. They also reported they gained useful skills and knowledge that facilitated their involvement as sole researchers. This perception was endorsed by the adult facilitators who expressed that they have a feeling of pride and satisfaction from the positive learning outcomes of the child-led research project, especially around the benefits for the young participants. They agreed that the children and young people developed good analytical skills and learned useful research techniques that were pivotal to equip them with the knowledge and confidence to engage meaningfully in the project and to interact efficiently with their peer researchers and the research population. Suji, a staff member from the *Dhaka* case study, summarised some aspects of the capacity building process:

We conducted training on the concept of research and methods... We taught them more about focus groups, interviews, survey and secondary review. Finally, we taught them about the stakeholders and how they can use the data while working with them. It was very interesting; children really want to learn and took everything positively. (Suji, staff member, *Dhaka* case study)

In this account, Suji described the specific training that the children and young people received, which were all mentioned by the young researchers as useful skills, gained as part of the training. In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, Kamal, the adult facilitator



confirmed the same positive outcomes and added that one of the most important components of the skills training was to provide them with self-assurance in order that they believed they were able to conduct research. This also included skills to negotiate and find common ground amongst each other. For instance, Almira, aged 15, shared, “I have learned to respect all the opinions and accept each other’s ideas. We should respect everyone even if you have different ideas”. In a similar vein, Dalia, aged 14, expanded this explanation and noted: “I used to be the boss before, the boss with all my friends, but now I have learned to listen to others, to exchange ideas and to find solutions through dialogue”.

To summarise, the young researchers and staff members concluded that children and young people who engaged in the child-led research benefited from the new learning in terms of conducting research, improving writing skills, developing analytical skills and embracing negotiation skills. This finding is supported by an extensive body of evidence that indicates child-led research from a process and outcomes perspective has a positive impact in acquiring new skills and that young researchers appreciate and value this result (e.g. Alderson, 2000; Kellett, 2010; Clark and Moss, 2011; Newell et al., 2012).

Regarding the impact on enhanced self-confidence, children and young people interviewed in this research reported a positive impact on their lives as they considered they gained self-esteem and self-confidence. In focus groups, the young researchers agreed that the child-led research provided them with a space to participate that was conducive to enjoying a joyful and meaningful experience, which enabled them to feel they were listened to and valued. This resonates with Fleming

(2011) who argues that when children and young people engage in participatory research they feel that their views matter and their interaction with peers is helpful in terms of gaining knowledge and skills that increase their confidence and sense of self-worth. While discussing issues of confidence and feelings of being valued children and young people from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, they said that their engagement in the child-led research helped them to cope with the pain, sadness and grief they experienced due to their refugee situation. They explained that they were isolated and many of them lost their social networks when they moved to their new host country. They described that they were depressed and had the feeling that no one cared about them. Hence, the invitation to join the child-led research opened a new space where they met peers in similar situations and felt supported, cared for and loved. Kamira, a young researcher, summarised these mutual feelings among participants:

Before, I thought that my problems were only my problems, but when I interviewed other children I learned that we shared similar problems and others suffered more than me and they had another kind of problems.  
(Kamira, aged 16, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

Kamira's reflection was shared on by many of her peers as they face similar experiences and similar feelings of satisfaction from being a part of a group where they met peers who had experienced the same pain and sorrow. This finding is in line with Hart and Tyrer's (2006) research that suggests when children and young people get involved in participatory activities with their peers they are able to cope with

hardship circumstances better. They achieved this by sharing their feelings and having joint initiatives, which results in improving their self-confidence and a sense of personal efficacy.

Similarly, Newell and colleagues (2012) argue that when participatory research involving children and young people is well conducted, the young researchers experience enthusiasm, pride and proficiency as a result of the space and support provided. Percy-Smith (2014) also suggests that when children and young people take part in participatory projects they gain benefits from learning from others and their confidence increases as they become aware of their abilities. Diya, aged 14, described the positive feelings of the young researchers:

First, I want to say that we all have learned many things and we have learned to value ourselves. We see ourselves now with better eyes. We learned to believe in our abilities and us. Before, people said 'you are children, you don't know anything' and we believed that. We now know that we know more than them because we have studied, read, and research. People are coming to us to ask questions. (Diya, aged 14, *Dhaka* case study)

Diya received a standing ovation when she concluded this reflection as it appears that her peers could not have agreed more with the way she summarised the increased confidence they experienced and the access to new spaces of participation that were previously inaccessible to them. They felt that the child-led research gave them a place where they were recognised as experts. This confidence was also reflected in their perseverance and determination to carry out their project. Aalok, Bangladeshi young researcher, noted:

We feel proud of ourselves because we were able to do research. We went to many houses asking questions and, although many doors were closed for us, we were confident and we went back many times until the people responded to our questionnaires. (Aalok, aged 15, *Dhaka* case study)

In this account, Aalok reflected on the primary reaction of people, which was not to respond to their question. However, due to the determination and confidence gained by being part of the project, the young researchers overcame initial rejections and continued to work until many doors were opened for them. While discussing self-esteem and self-confidence, children and young people also reported how positively the experience had impacted on their sense of belonging and being valued.

The findings from this research project confirmed that most of the young researchers agreed that they were delighted to meet new peers with whom they shared common interests, which increased their sense of belonging. They indicated they developed new friendships and felt they had a space to share and learn together with their peers. They reported this contributed to keeping them engaged in the project, as they wanted to be part of something meaningful that included other peers. Children and young people from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study mentioned that they were happy to make new friends as they were struggling with the lack of social contacts as they left their home country due to the war. Participants from the *Dhaka* case study said that they had known each other from a long time as they are all members of the Child Forum; however their participation in the child-led research reaffirmed their sense of belonging and new friendships were developed. Regarding their sense of being valued, the young researchers were positive about the

impact of their experiences on being accepted and valued by their peers, adult facilitators, stakeholders and decision-makers. Young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irdib* case study reported severe hardship and discrimination due to their refugee situation, so in this context the child-led research provided the opportunity to feel appreciated and recognised by others as valuable contributors for the first time in years. Dalia, a young researcher, aged 14, explained that many people were impressed by their child-led research. She noted that “when we finished the report everybody was coming to my house and asking my mother what I did. I felt like a very important person”.

Staff members indicated that young researchers were very committed and willing to take on responsibilities such as presenting their research report, having meetings with stakeholders or giving media interviews. These engagements contributed to their confidence, as they felt valued and respected by the fact that other people were listening to them and taking their opinions seriously. Kamal, a staff member from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, pointed out that he thought that the media interviews and meetings with people in power might cause stress or intimidation for the young researchers and explained carefully to them that they all had the right to decline these engagements. Kamal shared that none of them declined as they were so excited and confident of their work and mentioned that those who met with important stakeholders or those who were interviewed reported higher levels of confidence and being valued than the others young researchers. This resonates with Newell and colleagues (2012) who argue that the personal impacts on the young researchers is related to the way they perceive changes and their

contribution to the final outcomes of their projects. For instance those who disseminate the report via meetings and presentations are perceived as the ones that contribute the most to the impact of the research findings.

Equally, Hampshire and colleagues (2011) agree that participatory initiatives have several benefits in the self-esteem and sense of being valued, but they argue that this is a short-term benefit as any increase in confidence and aspirations could be lessened by new difficulties and negative changes in their social environments. However, two years on, children and young people from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study reported that they still have a sense of pride and confidence based on the result of the project and this helped them feel respected and to overcome difficulties in their daily lives as refugees. A young researcher, Hanadi, aged 16, explained that before the child-led research she felt depressed and undervalued but after the project her personality opened up and this helped her to face situations of bullying and harassment. For instance, every time she was bullied, she remembered that she participated in research, wrote a report and was interviewed in newspapers and TV channels, which are tasks that few children have successfully done. In terms of aspirations and vision for the future, interviews with the young researchers revealed some positive impact on their educational ambitions as a result of their participation. Jamila, a young researcher, noted:

This helped me to build more my personality. I was shy. If I had an idea I was not able to say it. Now, I feel stronger and I can express my opinions. I used to think that I would study and become a teacher. After this experience, I am thinking in other fields, maybe journalism. I discovered that I have a strong personality and I can become a journalist. (Jamila, aged 15, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

In this account, Jamila stated that the child-led research opened up new ideas about her academic decisions as she was exposed to other areas of knowledge. In conversation with other young researchers, she explained that she always thought that she could only be a teacher as this is one of the few options for girls who want to pursue higher education in her community. She now wants to explore other options. Jamila's reflection represents many other young researchers who want to study similar careers after being exposed to the project. When Jamila said that she discovered her strong personality, she implied an awareness of her strengths and becoming more comfortable with herself as a result of their participation in the child-led research. Data did not show that this new strong personality affected her interactions with other researchers or participants negatively. In the *Dhaka* case study, half of the respondents would like to become researchers as adult professionals. The other half wanted to continue to study at school and in higher education in the areas of sciences, communications and teaching. One young researcher noted that it does not matter which discipline they study, they can always do research in their chosen area.

This section shows how children and young people perceived a positive impact of the child-led research projects on their feelings, especially concerning self-confidence and self-esteem. These views were also supported by interviews with the adult facilitators who acknowledged these positive outcomes. This is consistent with research that found that when children and young people engage in their own research they experience encouraging personal outcomes as they learn and interact

with others (Newell et al., 2012). Similarly, Roberts (2009) points out that the participation of young researchers in their own research contributes to their confidence and personal development. In the next section, I will discuss the impact of the child-led research on the supporting organisation, which was not an unexpected outcome of the child-led research projects.

#### **6.4.1 Child-led research impact on World Vision programming**

Although the impact on World Vision's programming was not a stated objective of the child-led research in the two case studies, interview data confirms that the projects made a positive impact on the organisation and its staff members. The emerging findings of my study created new opportunities to engage children and young people in decision-making. According to the professionals interviewed, the child-led research contributed to changing many staff members' mindsets who were previously somewhat sceptical of the abilities of children and young people to carry out the research and gave new direction to programmatic interventions. This included child-led research as a methodology in country office programmes. When I asked how these changes were perceived, a staff member responded:

I think the child-led research was very powerful and changed many people's mindsets. The humanitarian workers are very busy, but if they take the time to listen to children, this can make a big difference. As humanitarians we abide by standards such as accountability to beneficiaries ... It is our duty to hear their voices. I see the child-led research influencing the humanitarian people to listen to children and to remind them about our child-focused mandate. (Maha, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)



The staff member defined listening to children and young people as a World Vision mandate, but implied that this directive was not always followed and believed child-led research was an opportunity to reaffirm this mandate. I asked why humanitarian workers were not providing children and young people the space to participate? A staff member explained that due to the nature of humanitarian settings, such as the crisis in Syria, it is very difficult for officers to implement programmes that save lives and at the same time design operations to engage children and young people. The interviewees, however, agreed that child-led research emerged as a good model to be implemented in relief and development settings based on the positive experienced of the research conducted by refugee children from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study. Maha, staff member based in Lebanon, added further comments and pointed out:

We all know that in humanitarian response everything is fast; we assess, purchase, implement and many times we don't pay attention to people's opinions and views. This report was seen for the first time as an opportunity for children to speak out their fears, their preferences and their views to be able to influence the agenda they want to see happening, especially how the humanitarian response can involve them. This was a ground-breaking thing in the humanitarian arena. (Maha, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

As a result of the success of the child-led research in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, Maha pointed out that these was a big change in the way that humanitarian workers could approach children and young people's participation in their practice. From a development programme perspective, staff members in Bangladesh reported that

the credibility of the child-led research project increased as staff members saw how children and young people undertook the research and the impact that they had on decision-making and changing traditional paternalist attitudes towards children and young people.

In my position as an insider researcher, I reported the emerging findings of my research project to the organisation and proposed several actions to upscale the child-led research project and suggested it be included as one of the recommended approaches that can be used to strengthen children and young people's participation programmes. My involvement in influencing these changes is a result of the access I have to the institutional settings where my research was conducted and my recommendations were accepted based on existing working relationships (Floyd and Arthur, 2012). This can be problematic due to my dual functions as researcher and staff member, as discussed in the methodology section. However, it also brings with it positive outcomes, since my role as insider researcher, coupled with my position within the organisation, enabled me to use my credibility and rapport to facilitate changes inside the organisation as a result of my research findings (Mercer, 2007). As a result of the credibility gained by the child-led research projects in the two case studies, more staff members are keen to include children and young people's participation in their programmes. Interview data showed that the child-led research had an impact on World Vision as a child focused organisation. Several strategic actions were developed to promote the understanding of the value of child-led research programmes and to move this approach forward. Examples include:

- The World Vision Strategic Direction for Child and Young People Participation includes, as one of the five core objectives to participation, the use of child-led methodologies in child-led research.
- Child-led research methodology has been included as one of the three central approaches in the engagement of children and young people as a key driver of the global campaign to end violence against children.
- Child-led research is a recommended methodology for programmatic interventions such as social accountability, children's peacebuilding and Article 15 projects.
- Child-led research is recommended as a methodology to ensure children and young people's participation in humanitarian and emergency programmes.
- A manual to support children and young people carrying out child-led research was developed and distributed to the World Vision country offices.
- Four country offices (Chile, Ghana, Romania and Sri Lanka) adopted the child-led research methodology in their children and young people's participation programmes. (World Vision, 2017b)

Staff members pointed out that these changes were possible through the dissemination of programme lessons learned, cases studies and project evaluations. They also highlighted that the efforts of young researchers and their adult facilitators were acknowledged by including this practice as a preferred methodology for children and young people's participation in strategic documents.

#### **6.4.2 Section conclusion**

In this section I have continued to address the third research question regarding the impact of the child-led research projects from personal and organisational perspectives rather than looking at impacts on decision-making. The discussion focused primarily on the impact that the child-led research project had in the lives of the young researchers, which also touched the Question 1 about their experiences in

engaging in child-led research. Most of the young researchers interviewed in this study felt that they acquired new information and developed good skills to engage in research, and that this was a rewarding experience that built their confidence. Most of the adult participants also felt that the young researchers had developed analytical skills and become more aware of their abilities to participate in a process of generating knowledge. Enhanced self-confidence and being valued were mentioned by participants as key gains from their participation in the child-led research. This reflects similar findings from Percy-Smith (2014), which show the positive impact that these activities can have on children and young people. Studies have found that child-led research experiences helped young researchers build confidence and acquire new skills, which have been appreciated and valued by the participants (e.g. Clark and Moss, 2011; Newell et al., 2012). In terms of the impact on skills acquisition and knowledge, most of the young researchers from the two case studies felt that the child-led research was a rewarding experience where they learned new skills and tools. Using the “*Learning from our experience*” tool, children and young people rated the learning skills and knowledge as being the area with high positive impact as a result of their participation in their project. Among the skills acquired, they mentioned writing, research, group facilitation, and negotiation skills.

Regarding the supporting organisation, young researchers did not envision making an impact on World Vision, but data interviews suggested that the child-led research made a positive impact on the organisation. The changes that World Vision experienced in terms of shifting staff members’ attitudes towards children and young people’s participation and the decision-making process around implementing new

programmes that included child-led research as a recommended methodology for engaging children and young people in decision-making.

## 6.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter discussed how the young researchers in the two case studies used the findings from their child-led research projects to inform policy and practice development and how they raised awareness on the issues they wanted to change as a result of their research. This chapter addressed mainly the Question 3:

**Question 3** - In what ways does child-led research influence decision-making? (And why and how do they do so?)

This chapter, similarly to Chapter 5, also touches on some components of Question 1 regarding the experiences of the young researchers when engaged in their child-led research projects. Data from my study confirms the diverse ways in which the young researchers engaged in the knowledge exchange strategy in order to explore how outcomes of child-led research positively or negatively contribute to influencing decision-making. Findings show that both case studies had a well-developed knowledge exchange strategy, which was considered by the research participants as a pivotal feature for successful impact on decision-making. As seen from the data, the engagement of the young researchers in the knowledge exchange varied significantly from one case study to the other. For instance, in the *Dhaka* case study, the young researchers had the control of the knowledge exchange, but in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, young researchers had a minor intervention in the decision-

making process. Despite this factor, in both case studies, evidence showed that the knowledge exchange plans were successful in reaching a large audience as planned. The *Dhaka* case study targeted local decision makers and the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study directed a global audience more than a local one. Nevertheless, the young researchers had different views regarding the impact of their child-led research on decision-making and how the decision makers took their recommendations into account. This echoes research by Lundy (2007) who argues that one of the criticism by children and young people who get involved in participatory initiatives is that adults and decision-makers might listen to them, but eventually ignore their views and suggestions transforming their participation into a token gesture. Young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study pointed out that their impact was almost non-existent. However, this was explained by two factors: the absence of a previous network at the local level and the lack of feedback they received on how the research findings were used.

The contexts where the child-led research projects were conducted and disseminated were very different and seems this affected their impact. Young researchers from the *Dhaka* case study claimed they had a major impact on the local authorities as they had a pre-existing strong network with them and decision makers were open to listen to them as the context was supportive to such types of engagement. In *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, the context was more restrictive due to the political situation and the refugee status of the young researchers. This resonates with Johnson's (2011) views that children and young people's participation is closely linked to the substantial characteristics of contexts, in which some contexts offer

better conditions than other for the participation of children and young people. Similarly, Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010) argue that participation has a wide variety of connotations depending the contexts where is implemented, so children and young people's participation needs to be understood within a social context. However, Johnson (2011) argues that contexts not always determine the way that children and young people can participate, as this process is bi-directional, which means that contexts influence the way that participate works, but also children and young people can influence and change their contexts.

This chapter also discussed the way staff members and young researchers engaged in a collaborative effort to disseminate the results of the research, in which both believed that the mutual collaboration in the knowledge exchange strategy was critical to ensure that the research findings were seen by relevant stakeholders and decision-makers. Interestingly, this phase of the child-led research projects were considered to have a strong adult-child relationship component, but the previous phases of the research processes were considered to be more child-led, in which the roles of adults were minimal and related to facilitation only. This challenges child-led research concepts and how power is negotiated between adults and young researchers. The next chapter discusses the adult-child and child-child relationships in child-led research projects and how these have an impact on the implementation of this approach.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## 7 Responding to motivations, tensions and interactions in child-led research

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the multifaceted relationships between adult facilitators and children and young people that developed whilst conducting child-led research projects. These relationships involve emotional bonds, authority and negotiation processes, which together construct and reconstruct the meanings of these relationships. A number of studies in current literature have explored how the relational practices between adult facilitators and children and young people have an impact on the processes and outcomes of participatory projects, especially those which claim to be child-led (e.g. Thomas, 2012; Wyness, 2013; Tisdall, 2014). This final findings chapter focuses entirely on the Question 1:

**Question 1-** What are children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research as a way to influence decision-making?



In exploring the experiences of the children and young people in engaging with child-led research, this chapter discusses the relationships formed amongst the young researchers and adult facilitators and examines whether these relationships made an impact on the commitment of young researchers to remain engaged and to what extent contributed to the success of the child-led research. These relationships, however, are not always easy and are often characterised by dynamics of power, unequal control of resources and disparity based on gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status amongst other factors (Skelton, 2008). This chapter then explores how adult facilitators and young researchers deal with those issues, in addition to the conflict based on potential competing agendas. The analysis also touches on some tensions amongst the young researchers themselves and how power relations were negotiated and addressed.

## **7.2 Role of adult facilitators interacting with the young researchers**

As reviewed in Chapter Two, extensive literature recognises the important role that adults play in children and young people's participation (e.g James, 2007; Lundy, 2007; Morrow, 2008; Thomas, 2012; Wyness, 2013; Tisdall, 2014). This is reflected in most child participation typologies, which include components of interpersonal interaction amongst adults and children and young people. For example, Hart's Ladder of Participation has eight rungs that describe the role that adults play in participatory initiatives, going from manipulation to child-initiated shared decisions with adults (Hart, 1992). Similarly, Treseder (1997) argues that the different types of participation can be analysed based on the relations between adults and children.

These can vary from adults deciding on the project and children volunteering for it, to children leading and adults being supportive but not in charge. However, child-adult relations have not always been free of tensions due to issues of control, hierarchy and power (Alderson, 2015). Tisdall and colleagues (2014) capture this in their argument that one of the key challenges in participatory initiatives is the fact that adults have failed to adapt systems and approaches to enable meaningful participation. This resonates with interview data from this study in which children and young people who engaged in child-led research pointed out the critical role of adult facilitators in the project and dynamics generated amongst them that contributed to the success of their initiatives. In order to unpack the experiences of the young researchers within these complex adult-child relationships, this chapter discusses how these relationships involve emotional bonds, authority and negotiation processes.

One of the themes that emerged from the interview data is the emotional connection that children and young people built with their adult facilitators and how these relations impacted the child-led research project. According to the respondents, there are three elements to this: the personality of the adult facilitators, emotional bonds and skills or abilities. First, children and young people in the two case studies valued certain characteristics associated with positive emotional responses due to the facilitator's personality and a number of child participants commented on the outward expressions of the facilitator. A Tahirah, a 13-year-old Syrian girl shared a commonly expressed view: "He had a good heart and was very kind". Here, Tahirah made a connection between the personal

characteristics of the facilitator a “good heart” and how this made the group of children feel loved, respected and listened to. Dalia, aged 14, built on Tahirah’s reflection and added: “He was always smiling and helping us. He supported and gave very positive comments even though we knew that the things were not perfect. He was always cheering us up”. As with Tahirah and Dalia, most of the child respondents indicated that they liked and appreciated their adult facilitator and this positive connection made them to enjoy their time within the research project. One of the findings of this study is that the personal characteristics of the adult facilitator appear to be crucial in the accomplishment of the children and young people’s activities. Child participants recalled qualities like tenderness, caring, sympathetic, understanding, supportiveness and being non-manipulative, as some of the main characteristics of their facilitators, which made them feel valued, respected and encouraged to participate in the project. Furthermore, Farid, 17-year-old Syrian participant, reflected on the role of his facilitator and how he related to them:

Everything was good. Kamal helped us in many things; he was always trying to see who needed help. Even when we were divided in groups, he helped every group with their needs. He was always smiling and we felt so relaxed.  
(Farid, aged 17, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

In this reflection, Farid summarised a mutual feeling amongst many of the children and young people that their adult facilitator was supportive in regards to the technical aspects, “helped us in many things” but that they also valued key aspects of his personality, “always smiling”, which relaxed them and gave them a sense of being part of a team rather than being perceived as an oppressive adult in authority.

The relationship and support provided by this adult facilitator was highly valued by the participants and is in contrast to their view of other adult professionals, working with children as facilitators or educational staff, who were perceived by the young researchers in lacking the skills and tools to work with children. A 16-year-old Syrian young participant, Abir, explained: “in the support that Kamal was doing, everything was great. I didn’t feel at all he was behaving as a teacher; I felt he was like a friend”. As Abir suggested, many of the young researchers compared the personality and characteristics of their facilitators with other adults with whom they interact and they found that their facilitator made them feel more comfortable to engage and was more like a friend. In a global research project, Cornish (2010) found similar findings that revealed that children and young people remained engaged in community-based activities when their facilitators are nice and kind and many other children and young people drop out due to bad experiences with facilitators who are rude and disrespectful.

When asked whether these good characteristics of an adult facilitator’s personality were the norm or the exception, young researchers responded that few facilitators are sensitive to their needs and most staff members working with them are serious, boring and hard to understand. Kellett (2011) argues that one of the major challenges faced by adults working with young researchers is to adapt their approach from managing children’s research to one that is more supportive and less intrusive. She points out that this change in mindset appears to be harder for adults who have been working with children and young people in a more directive way, for instance schoolteachers and other educational staff. From the data generated in this

study, the adult facilitators working with the young researchers in both case studies embraced a more supportive, less coercive and cooperative approach in contrast with the directive traditional approach that the children and young mentioned regarding other staff members.

Kamal, one of the adult facilitators who worked in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, both in Jordan and Lebanon, indicated that children and young people often expect to interact with adults who are authoritarian, inflexible and value discipline more than any other aspects of the activities. He explained that this change in expectations, from being an authoritarian facilitator to one who is flexible, approachable and caring, makes a difference in the way that children and young people connect with the adult facilitator. This helps to create bonds between them. Young researchers confirmed what Kamal described; they expected to have a strict facilitator but were happily surprised to find a caring and easy-going person.

From my own observation, the interaction in the sessions and the relationship between adult facilitators and young researchers was affective, relaxed, comfortable and free from pressure. I reflected this in my field notes:

I arrived before the facilitator and I was talking with some of the children and young people. They were laughing about my accent, as I could not pronounce some of the words they were teaching me. The facilitator arrived and all of them ran to hug or kiss him. They were so happy to see him. The session started and everything was smooth, peaceful and pleasant. Children were talking, laughing and giving some ideas of an activity. The facilitator was like another young person in the place. (Excerpt from field notes, 14 November 2015)

This example illustrates that the facilitators' personal characteristics are critical to build rapport and communicate in an effective way with children and young people. When I asked children and young people what factors motivated them to remain in the project and commit to a long-term engagement, many of them mentioned that empathy and the positive emotional connection they made with the adult facilitator were major factors as they felt safe, comfortable, amused and supported. The impact that a positive and caring attitude has on children and young people is enormous. The whole participatory process is fundamentally relational and relies on the abilities of the practitioners to engage with the young participants (Kina, 2012). The interview data suggest that the adult facilitators nurtured a key trigger behind this bond. They established these emotional bonds with young participants as they positioned themselves as part of the participatory process and not as an external party (Pinkney, 2011). While observing meetings with the young researchers, I noticed that the adult facilitator, in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, established a rapport with the participants through informal conversations with each young person, asking questions about school, family and social activities. He was friendly, caring, smiley and acted like a person without any adult authority power over them. This is summarised in the field notes below:

Children and young people are around the facilitators, some of them are asking him questions, others are observing shyly. He talks to everyone, asking simple everyday questions but not in a silly or disempowering way. He was just talking like another person in the group. He still looks like an adult, not pretending to be young, but he is very close to the children. (Excerpt from field notes, 3 October 2015)

It was evident from the data that the process of child-led research was emotional for both young researchers and adult facilitators. One of the child participants from Jordan explained that they like the company of the facilitator and they expected for him to stay with them for a long time and not just for one activity. Jamila said: “I want to have a new project now. Don’t leave us alone”. When we discussed this issue deeper, Jamel, aged 14 from Jordan, reflected: “I was not happy when they [the organisation] gave us the report. The facilitator didn’t come. It was very formal, boring. They came they showed us the report, and they left”.

In this comment, Jamal expressed his feelings of disappointment because the adult facilitator did not attend the closing activity when they received their final research report. His main point was not that the meeting was just a formality or boring; he wanted to make clear that he had a high expectation of the facilitator and the activity without him there was incomplete. This feeling was also evident from nonverbal cues such as his gestures and facial expressions. When I asked Kamal, the main facilitator, about this situation, he said that he knew that it was important for the young researchers to meet with him for the last time in order to close this process in a supportive way. This is reflected in my field notes:

I talked to the facilitator during the break and told him that I feel this issue with the boy needs to be addressed as I feel he was sad as well the other participants. He said that he already talked to him and reassured him that he loves them and feels proud of their achievements. (Excerpt from field notes, 10 March 2016)

However, Kamal was based in a different country and it was too costly to travel to Jordan for a one-day activity. Moreover, he shared the same feelings of frustration

with children and young people regarding the lack of a proper closure of the child-led research project. The importance of closure cannot be underestimated as it is a necessary component to allow children and young people to understand that the end of the process may mean that they will not see their adult facilitators anymore or will interact with them in a different capacity (Pinkney, 2011). From the interviews with staff members and young researchers, it was evident that the closure was not done properly and these affected the young participants to varying degrees.

Respondents also pointed out that emotions were present when children and young people were brainstorming and discussing issues covered by their research. Some past memories of the war or challenging family times triggered some sadness and untoward emotions. Kamal, the main facilitator from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, explained the difficulties of working with children and young people who have faced a traumatic situation and how staff members need to be equipped to deal with. He noted:

One of the concerns was about the refugee situation and the traumas that children had as a result of the war. For instance, during the sessions a child was crying and others weren't able to talk. These are situations that we need to handle well and we need to be prepared. One of the learnings was that we need to prepare our staff members on psychosocial intervention in case these situations arise in sessions and along the project. (Kamal, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

As Kamal revealed, facilitators and other staff members were confronted by difficult emotional situations that were sometimes challenging to manage due to the lack of skills of the adult involved. One of the staff respondents confessed that she froze and



did not know what to do when a girl started crying in one of the sessions. She thought that hugging her would be inappropriate and disempowering for the girl. She said that she expected some response from the main facilitator who was well-trained to manage this type of situation. However, the facilitator was male and, due to cultural and religious restrictions of the site, he thought he was not in a situation to embrace the girl either. A third female staff member reacted quickly, hugging the girl and taking her out of the room to comfort and give some water. After a few minutes, the girl felt better and returned to the room.

This example confirms the critical urgency to equip facilitators and adults interacting with children and young people with the skills and knowledge to deal with the emotional components of the participatory process, support young researchers emotionally and manage their own emotions. Törrönen and Vornanen (2014) also express this concern while conducting research with young researchers and point out facilitators and other professionals interacting with children and young people must be trained to provide emotional support to young participants and have the skills to react to any given challenging situation. In connection with this point, some respondents highlighted that it is important to develop skills to identify with the emotional information that children share during sessions and not ignore it on the basis that it is normal or frequent. In order to resolve the challenges, participants in this study highlighted that the role of the facilitator in the process was an essential component. For instance, the young researchers expressed that the facilitator made them feel supported, respected, loved, encouraged and confident. Furthermore, they pointed out that they remained in the project as they felt the research belonged

to them and the facilitator provided the support required to deal with every stage of the process well. Practitioners highlighted that the facilitator was pivotal in creating spaces for children and young people to articulate their views, experiences, needs and desires (Hart and Tyrer, 2006). Participants also reported that the facilitator used the appropriate methodology to bring children and young people's views to the debate and contribute to addressing the issues that they want raised (Kellett, 2005).

The interview data showed that adult facilitators are also more engaged when the children and young people make them feel loved, respected and appreciated as emotions are reciprocal by nature. However, some staff members explained that they faced challenges. For example, avoiding physical contact with children and young people while conducting the activities as per organisational child protection protocols. Some facilitators considered the protocols important to avoid inappropriate behaviour, but they also argued that this is unrealistic at times and limits their interaction with the children. Kamal stated:

One of the big gratifications of this job is to feel loved by children and they show this by hugging you. I cannot prevent this from them; this is part of the relationship we formed as we work together with them. (Kamal, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

Kamal explained that these restrictions are mitigated by the two-adult rule, which is a non-written practice that encourages two staff members are always together when children and young people are present to ensure no inappropriate behaviour occurs and allows for flexibility within the protection policy. Other staff members interviewed in this study confirmed this view and articulated that the way facilitators

work with children and young people is closely connected to their personal beliefs and conceptual viewpoints that understand children and young people as social actors who have the right to participate and engage in decision-making.

Data from this study illustrates the adult facilitators also make a professional and ideological decision to work with children and young people rather than with adults. This reflects their passion and commitment to work with the youngest generation, which came out many times during interviews and conversations. While observing the sessions conducted by the adult facilitators, I perceived that this commitment was reflected in many different means, from the manner they greet the participants to the way they respond to their questions, and it was evident that they really enjoyed their jobs. This is documented in the following field notes:

Whilst I am waiting for the children and young people to come to the meeting, I am observing the facilitator and how he is preparing the session. He is organising the room for the meeting and he tries to do his best with the few resources they have in the community centre. Some staff members came to see the room and said that they want to join the meeting with the children and young people. The facilitator thanked them for their interest but declined their request by saying this is a space for children and young people and adult presence could alter the dynamic of the session. Later, he explained to me that the norm is that children and young people would not be admitted in a professional meeting without an invitation, but staff members and adults in general think they just come along, enter in the room, observe the activities and even to take some photographs during the session. He also explained me that some of his colleagues do not even believe that children and young people are capable of conducting research, but he is absolutely convinced of young researchers' abilities. (Excerpt from field notes, 18 February 2016)

This observation made in the field is an example of how adult facilitators' understanding of children and young people's abilities and the social construction of

childhood has an enormous impact on the way they relate to the young researchers. Kamal, when asked about his understanding of children's capabilities, replied: "I believe that children and young people have the ability to lead their own research". A staff member in Bangladesh, Piyal, went further and responded: "Children can take the lead without any assistance". The fact that these facilitators embraced this position was reflected in the roles they adopted while supporting the young researchers, giving the young researchers a strong sense of confidence.

The other elements that enable the connection between children and facilitators are the facilitators' skills and abilities, which can be natural or developed through training. When I asked the adult facilitators about their roles and how they form a connection with children and young people, they responded that this comes naturally as it is an extension of their personalities. Moreover, they acknowledged that this is also the result of extensive training, mentoring and other capacity-building approaches. In relation to the skills mentioned above, a detailed review of each facilitator's job description revealed that the main requirements to hold this position were a bachelor's degree, at least one year's relevant work experience with children, a strong interest in protecting the rights of vulnerable children, a high ability to interact and communicate effectively with children, self-motivation, focus and creativity. This skillset seems reasonable to expect from an organisational perspective; however, some years ago, I conducted a participatory evaluation with children and young people in Lebanon where participants evaluated their adult facilitator (Cuevas-Parra, 2011). In that assessment, child participants identified a very different set of skills and abilities that they considered essential for a facilitator:

[The facilitator] reacts rapidly to any given situation, takes children's opinions into consideration, has a sense of humour, is cultured and well-educated, has a good heart, has a joyful spirit, does not hurt children's feelings, has good ideas, is wise, does not bother children, communicates using easy language, [is] energetic and enthusiastic [and is] charming and sympathetic to children. (Cuevas-Parra, 2012, p25)

This set of social skills and personal characteristics are rarely included in job descriptions and are not considered critical components of performance appraisals. That said, the World Vision job description includes some of the aspects mentioned above, such as the ability to communicate effectively with children and creativity. However, these are just two characteristics while the children and young people who participated in this study confirmed that the list of desirable characteristics of the adult facilitators was substantially more extensive. When asked about their facilitators, they agreed that the facilitators were well equipped and had the knowledge and skills to support them. While one participant, Jamila aged 16, highlighted the great support they received from the facilitator to “put the ideas in order and [do] a report like this”, another young participant from Lebanon, Abdulla, aged 18, offered a more detailed explanation:

First, we had the freedom to say everything we want. Second, the way we were treated by the facilitators, that was excellent. And the last one, we had an easy process to present the information and make decisions about what to include or not in the report. (Abdulla, aged 18, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

Jamila's and Abdulla's reflections show that children and young people value the information provided as well as the guidance and the freedom they have during the

child-led research process. For instance, they raised some concerns about the difficulties of conducting research, but no one complained about their facilitators' skills or abilities to work with them. One might think that perhaps this absence of criticism towards the facilitators is due to a lack of confidence or fear of reprisals. However, in the multiple conversations I had with child participants, asking the same questions different ways over several days, they consistently reported similar positive evaluations of their facilitators. Based on my previous experiences in participatory assessments, children and young people do not have any problem criticising adults who interact with them if they are provided with a safe space and good tools to deliver sensitive information.

While interviewing the adult facilitators in both case studies, I noticed that the facilitators had similar personalities and engagement approaches. Furthermore, no major differences in terms of knowledge and methods were found between them, even though they are from countries that are distinct in the way they perceive child participation as discussed in Chapter Four. It appears from the interview data that this is a result of World Vision's professional training, demanding very similar standards in their performance. However, I observed that they have different skillsets regarding research processes. For instance, in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, the facilitators had extensive experience facilitating child-led advocacy initiatives, such as child-led policy positions and child-led treaty body reporting processes, but they had less research training and were actively learning in parallel with the young researchers on how to conduct research. In the *Dhaka* case study, the facilitator was an experienced researcher with little experience in children and young people's

participation but was supported by a skilled child participation expert. The staff members interviewed in this study pointed out that these factors did not affect the processes or outcomes of the child-led research as a participatory project. This shows that the combinations of skills and knowledge are critical in attaining good results as an adult facilitator in child-led research projects. The set of skills should complement each other and be able to cover multiples areas of knowledge. Jumanah, a staff member from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study noted:

Child participation requires highly qualified experts who can work directly with children. This requires professional expertise and capacity building. In the case of the child-led research, the requirements were high too. This was a research [study], so the staff members need to be more sophisticated in their knowledge while working with children in order to support them in producing a relevant, meaningful and credible process. (Jumanah, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

This reflection substantiates the importance of the ‘professional’ aspect of the role of facilitators moving away from having unqualified staff members to ones who are highly-skilled and well-trained professionals. In the *Dhaka* case, interviewees reached a similar conclusion as Jumanah, articulating that one of the key lessons learned was to dedicate more preparation time for the staff members facilitating the sessions with the young researchers, especially because this was a research project. The emphasis on capacity building resonates with literature that underlines the importance of preparing staff members who work with children (e.g. Arnot and Reay, 2007; Davis and Smith, 2012; Shier 2015). Wyness (2009) argues that the presence of adult facilitators in children and young people’s participation activities is crucial to

thrive, and thus they need to be well trained to accomplish the function of channelling and facilitating the interaction with young people.

As discussed, bonding and building relationships between adult facilitators and young researchers, skills and abilities of facilitators were key factors that ensured the long-term engagement of the young researchers in the child-led research project, leading to satisfactory results. However, research participants also pointed out that these interactions become more diffused and complicated when the boundaries between supporting and managing the young researchers are unclear.

### **7.2.1 The boundaries between providing support and managing the young researchers**

In most of the organisational contexts where children and young people interact with adults, there is a tendency to reinforce the authority that adults have over child participants as a result of age difference, experience, knowledge and social position (Plows, 2012). However, with both case studies the key principles underpinning the child-led research approach was to transform the adults' position of power by recognising children and young people as competent social actors with abilities, space and opportunities to conduct their own child-led initiatives (World Vision, 2015). Within this specific institutional context, child-led research challenges the traditional ways in which adult facilitators relate to children and young people by shifting the perception that adults are the experts and creating opportunities for young researchers to demonstrate that they are also experts on their lives (Törrönen and Vornanen, 2014). However, Spyrou (2011) argues that children and young people



can still see adult facilitators as individuals with knowledge experience and hold a position that can influence the work conducted by young researchers.

When I asked the adult facilitators in the interviews about their approaches and how they ensured that they facilitated the process, not managed it, they stressed that it is a difficult task to balance between providing guidance and support, whilst at the same time, being confident that the young researchers fully understand the basic concepts to carry out the research tasks (see also Shier, 2015). The facilitators said that they balanced the approach by only helping and making the project easy for the young researchers, but decision-making remained in the hands of the young researchers. Suji, staff member from Bangladesh, explained that their approaches with the young researcher were collaborative and treated them as equitable partners. Suji said: “We weren’t giving orders. We gave freedom to children but guided them. You can guide, but children make all the decisions”. Kamal articulated a similar rationale when describing their roles as facilitators:

It is important to say that the facilitator just gives guidance, but the children and young people must make decisions. We should not influence the content or themes that they want to include in the research. (Kamal, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

Suji and Kamal clearly framed their role as supporters who provide information and guidance to children and young people. They pointed out the decision-making process relied on the young researchers and they did not interfere in that process. The interview data revealed that adult facilitators and other staff members, such as Communications or Policy Officers involved in the design and implementation of the

child-led research project, showed a strong commitment to empower the young researchers with a special focus on defining their roles as enablers. They all share an emancipatory ideological position of child participation, which guides their work with children and young people. This resonates with Kellett (2010) who argues that to succeed in child-led research requires that adult facilitators are committed to create enabling environments to conduct this approach without adult management.

Staff members pointed out there is a need for support which be as broad as finding a suitable meeting venue to helping the young researchers to disseminate their findings amongst key stakeholders who would be difficult for them to access. However, they stated that this facilitation role does not compromise the role of the young researchers as decision makers in the research process in terms of the methodology, data collection, analysis and writing the report. Nonetheless, adult facilitators and the supporting organisation as a whole were responsible for the logistics, costs, security and other aspects.

Data shows that young researchers felt confident that they were decision makers and active in negotiating with their facilitator on the different phases of their research processes. However, as discussed in Chapter Six, there were some stages of the research where the young researchers were less active than in others (e.g. dissemination phase and child protection decisions). When I asked them to comment on the decision-making process and facilitator's role, Gita, aged 16, from Bangladesh noted: "We made a joint decision as a group to research on birth registration because it is important and many children are getting married with no birth certificates"(this means that they can be married off as no proof of age without a birth certificate).

Gita reinforced the idea of a joint decision where all participants have a say; however, it is unclear if this also included the facilitator. However, when I asked again, Abdulla, aged 18, explained the role of the adults further: “We decided to do the research, we prepared the questions. We interviewed other children and wrote the report. No adults did this job for us”.

In this quote, Abdulla confidently claimed ownership of their child-led research project with the understanding the adults just provided support. This was a trend across all the conversations with the young researchers, who were determined when explaining, that they took the control of the decision-making process in their project. They pointed out that each stage of their research was intensely debated by the young researchers and the adults who supported them did not impose the decisions. Remarkably, the presence of the adult facilitator in their meetings was not an element to define the ownership of the research project; this was based on who made the decisions and the young researchers were clear that they made them all.

Interview data, however, points to some tension between young researchers and adult facilitators regarding certain project decisions (e.g. child protection protocols, timeframe, data analysis and report format). Staff members explained that safety and protection of children and young people are not negotiable standards and they made decisions to ensure they follow those rules. Young researchers did not always understand those decisions. In support of this, other existing studies signal that adult facilitators must take precautions to minimise risks as young researchers can face stressful and unpleasant experiences during the data collection phase, such as rejections or impoliteness from respondents, requests for money and, in some

cases, the threat of physical violence (Hampshire et al., 2011; Todd, 2012). These types of situations suggest that adult support is critical to ensure the safety of the young researchers, especially when they conduct research on sensitive issues and collect data directly from the communities. Interview data from this project shows that there were situations in which adult facilitators made some decisions to ensure the safety and protection of the young researchers. Some decisions caused tensions but, nevertheless, it was evident from interviews that these tensions did not damage the process and were addressed by ensuring a trusting relationship and mutual respect. One example was the decision to make the data anonymous, including changing the names of the young researchers. The names and other identifiers were removed in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study in order to ensure their safety, as the research topic was considered very sensitive by the supporting organisation. This was explained to the young researchers. Yet, it is unclear from the data if the young researchers accepted an idea or suggestion as they considered it was useful or because they did not have a solid argument to defend their position. During interviews, participants raised this issue multiple times as they felt frustrated because they were not recognised as the authors of the research. The young researchers logically explained the reasoning behind using pseudonyms, but at the same time complained that they could not prove to their friends and relatives that they co-wrote the research report because their names were not there. This example illustrates the thin line between a joint agreement and an imposition. In response, a staff member explained:

This is an issue that we haven't resolved yet. Children were very much involved in the research and they wanted to be treated as the lead authors. There is a grey area between the empowerment of children and the child protection policies. One way in which we resolved this was that we highlighted the group work rather than individual participants. The recognition is through the group they belong to. (Suji, staff member, Bangladesh)

Suji pointed out a problematic issue raised by the young researchers. They wanted to be recognised by their work in the research but ethical considerations and child protection protocols limited their desires and their names were replaced by pseudonyms. Even though they understood and initially agreed on the rationale for this decision, they later complained they did not feel recognised as lead authors as their names were not mentioned. Tisdall and colleagues (2009) argue that it is critical to examine the role that children and young people play in disseminating their research findings and how sensitive issues such as anonymity versus credit for their work can be handled in balancing recognition of authorship and child protection amongst other factors.

Another aspect of the tension is control and decision-making. Staff members and young researchers concurred that a critical component in balancing the control that an adult facilitator could have over the young researchers is the knowledge acquired through training and capacity building. When children and young people are equipped with skills, tools and information they are able to take control of their research project and are freer to negotiate with their adult facilitators (see also Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008). The sense of freedom was highly valued and a feature present at the two case studies, which could be interpreted as absence of control or

limited adult authority. However, this can also be analysed from another lens. Children and young people in the two case studies were exposed to very restricted environments, such as home and school, where the opportunities to participate are minimal. As a contrast, the child-led research project could appear as space of extraordinary freedom as stated by all the young researchers during data collection. However, this begs the question around the limits to that freedom: who develops the project and why and who decides the themes under which children conduct the research? For instance, what will happen if the children want to conduct research on sports or recreational activities rather than the effects of the refugee situation or child marriage? Will these topics be endorsed by the supporting organisation? This will be discussed in next section.

### **7.2.2 Challenging interactions between young researchers and supporting organisation**

The active involvement of the supporting organisation in child-led research projects raises the question of the tension between the facilitator's and young researchers' roles in shaping the process and outcomes of the child-led research. In order to determine that, Johnson (2011) argues that it is critical to examine organisational definitions of child and young people's participation to understand how they might affect the different levels of participation and the final outcomes. Furthermore, Hart and Tyrer (2006) state that any form of participatory research with children and young people requires the organisations to reflect on the ways they are prepared to negotiate the research process while not imposing their own institutional agenda.

World Vision's child participation goal is "to excel in creating and advocating for enabling environments that empower children and young people as social actors, advocates and partners for child well-being" (World Vision, 2015,p9). An enabling environment is understood as one where the views, opinions and perspectives of children and young people are sought, listened to and respected at all levels of society. This is done by promoting a shift from ownership over children's groups towards an approach that strengthens the active participation of children and young people in the formulation, preparation, implementation and follow-up of their groups or associations. Moreover, the final outcome is to empower children and young people to self-organise and lead their own initiatives, which implies that staff members are facilitators and enablers rather than as group managers (World Vision, 2015).

The child-led research project was developed and implemented by World Vision as part of its goal to provide children and young people with opportunities to influence decision-making processes. Respondents pointed out that despite, the fact that the young researchers did not participate in the design of this initiative, they believe that the process is still good as children and young people were able to engage in the research project and influence the process by including their views at all stages of the child-led research and determining the outcomes of the project. However, how were vulnerable children and young people able to negotiate aspects of the process with a large organisation controlling the resources and the process of project implementation? Staff members interviewed in this study explained that the concept of child-led research does not exclude the organisation and staff members

from the process, but regulates their level of engagement in decision-making and ensures that young researchers also own the process. Tisdall (2016) argues that this practice has the potential to facilitate the engagement of children and young people in collective decision-making but it must be protected from being just part of the agenda of the supporting organisations. In order to understand the agenda of the organisation and how this influences the child-led research process, it is necessary to examine the project's formation in order to analyse how it was created, how it is outlined within organisational objectives and what spaces there are for children and young people to be part of the project (see also Sharpe, 2015). The interview data and observation field notes revealed that the most common understanding from young researchers was that this was their own project as they claimed that they controlled all aspects of the process such as the definition of the research focus, data collection tools, data analysis and writing the final report. Staff members articulated that young researchers did have the freedom to choose the topics and specific angles but it was done within a set of organisational priorities and objectives, which are strongly linked to their programmes, strategies and funding. This revealed that the project was generated with a precise objective and confirmed that it is very difficult for organisations and professionals to have a neutral interest in the child-led research projects as they all have some level of organisational or professional interest (see also Törrönen and Vornanen, 2014). Facilitators pointed out that they often acted as mediators between the interests of the organisation and the young researchers to find a common ground and agreements. This reflects Wyness' (2009) view on the challenges that professionals working with children and young people face in



connecting their interests with those from the supporting organisations and they need to meditate and bring them in line with the relevant dominant adult agendas.

However, when I asked the young researchers about these potential tensions, they acknowledged that the child-led research project was possible due to the backing of the supporting organisation, which provides logistical assistance in addition to access to information and guidance on how to conduct the research. They highlighted that being part of a group that has the support of a large organisation was very positive in terms of amplifying their views. Dalia, aged 14, noted: “World Vision was like the speakers that helped us [so] that our voices can reach a bigger number of people”.

### **7.2.3 Organisational tension between participation and protection**

As many of the major child-focused organisations, World Vision’s work is guided by a set of child protection policies, standards and protocols that are intended to assist staff members to consider, prepare for and protect children and young people from any potential harm that may arise in their activities or projects (e.g. World Vision, 2012; Plan International, 2013; Save the Children, 2013). One of the ways that child protection policies are enforced is through the application of ‘do no harm’ principles, which implies that the organisation must ensure that activities, or lack of action, do not adversely affect or expose children, families and communities to greater harm. This includes the risk of violence or retribution as a result of speaking out on sensitive issues. In order to minimise the risks, World Vision sets minimum standards such as voluntary and inclusive participation, attention to ethical principles, informed

consent and protocols dictating the organisation's response to children showing signs of distress during activities (World Vision, 2012).

Interview data revealed that the existence of this essential set of child protection policies is highly valued by participants, as everyone's main concern is to ensure the safety of the children and young people. However, interviews with staff members brought up some complexities between the ideological position of children and young people as competent social actors and the more traditional views of children as vulnerable subjects in need of protection. From this study's data, it emerged that some staff members experienced tensions between the professional child empowerment approach and the protection mandate they are instructed to follow. A situation considered by Shier (2015) who argues that these tensions puts them in challenging situations as they need to make decisions that can affect either approach. A staff member in Bangladesh, Suji, noted:

This is a very challenging issue. We are struggling between giving children autonomy and empowerment, but we have also our own child protection mandate and our responsibility to protect them. (Suji, staff member, *Dhaka* case study)

Suji exemplified recurrent struggles that staff members face when deciding whether to treat children and young people as individuals able to make their own decisions or as members of a vulnerable population that need to be taken care of, especially when the project is labelled as child-led. Staff members are confronted by their personal conceptions on the structures and policies that can restrict their participation in order to ensure a safe and protective environment for the young researchers. There

was a common agreement amongst staff members that young researchers could be at risk when they want to research sensitive or taboo issues or use their findings to challenge authorities, community leaders or any person with authority over them. Similarly, Shier (2015) argues that child-led research projects need to have appropriate methodologies and effective facilitation mechanisms to identify any child protection concerns that could affect the participants. However, Shier points out that it is critical not to overstress the risks but assess carefully when research conducted by young researchers touches controversial or sensitive issues. In interviews, staff members reported that some time ago a young person from the Democratic Republic of Congo was shot and killed after he participated in a children's parliament activity. This tragic event changed the way that many people in the organisation perceived children and young people's participation and a number of staff members were reluctant to continue conducting activities with children that may pose risks in certain situations. They also mentioned the case of Malala Yousafzai, the world-renowned Pakistani girl who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, who was shot in the head for campaigning for girls' education. These are dramatic examples of the risks that participation can bring to children and young people (see also Sharpe, 2015).

The measures taken towards the safety of the child participants during World Vision activities reflect a possible conflict that undermines the concept of children and young people as competent social actors, which seems to be weakened by the protection standards implemented by the gatekeeper, including the need of parental consent as an essential requirement for children to participate (see also Skelton,

2008). Adult facilitators pointed out that protocols should be reviewed in order to mitigate the tension between protection and participation and to contribute to closing the gap between children and young people's views and the organisational child protection policies. However, they did not articulate suggestions how this could be done, as this needs to be decided in the highest levels of the organisation governance. For Pinkney (2011), there is a permanent tension between participation and protection rights, which are reflected inside organisations where staff members could have different views and positions:

... Professionals who are passionate and committed to working with children within a rights framework and their discomfort arise[s] when they see their organisations working against and undermining the child's participation rights'. (Pinkney, 2011, p44)

Pinkney's reflection echoes the position of most of the staff members interviewed in the study who mentioned that they struggled in balancing the participation and protection standards, but there is a tendency to prioritise more protection over participation. For instance, as discussed in Chapter Six, a complex situation that emerged from the interview data was the decision to not include the young researchers in the public event launching the research report in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study in order to ensure their safety. This decision illustrates the power of the supporting organisation to determine the level of children and young people's participation when it comes to protection and safety. Sharpe (2015) points out that this type of decisions taken by the organisations working with children and young people reveal the power dynamics on participation and decision-making between

organisations and children and young people. However, from another perspective, this decision can be analysed as part of the ongoing struggle that organisations and staff members have in providing children and young people with opportunities to participate but also ensuring their protection and safety. A staff member provided an explanation of the decision:

At the beginning we wanted to invite [the] children and young people to the launch event, but we did a quick child protection assessment and we decided not to include them for security issues. Most of them don't have papers and they have an illegal status in the country and to travel from the Bekaa Valley where they live to Beirut can be risky. There are many Army check points ... We decided to show a video where six children, who were elected by the other children, talked about this research and presented the process, the main findings and recommendations. (Kamal, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

Kamal expressed concerns that were validated by a risk assessment. However, it was not clear to me if there were elements of excessive protectionism on one hand and a joint decision process with the young researchers on the other. Tisdall (2016) argues that in most cases professionals are called to identify and act when a child protection concern arises. However, they often exclude children and young people from debating the concerns and providing suggestions. When I asked about the process, they said that the young researchers were consulted and informed, but that staff members made the final decision. World Vision states that participation, as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC must be balanced with the right to life, survival and development granted in Article 6 (World Vision, 2015). However, Lundy and colleagues (2011) argue that in accordance with an explicit UNCRC-informed

approach the views of children and young people should be incorporated into the decisions as they are recognised as rights holders. That said, Lundy (2007) points out the Article 12 cannot be interpreted in isolation as it is connected to other rights such as the right to guidance, the right to be protected from abuse and the best interests of the child. The World Vision Child Protection Risk Assessment guide for child participation describes:

There may be times when certain forms of child participation is not the appropriate course of development or empowerment within a community due to contextual factors that place the life of children in danger. It is the responsibility of World Vision staff to balance children's right to meaningful participation with their equally important right to life, survival and development. (World Vision, 2015, p1)

From the review of the policy, staff members followed the correct procedures, analysed the context and made a justifiable decision based on risk assessment protocols, which made this process a promising practice from an organisational child protection perspective. However, in terms of participation the decision to exclude the young researchers from the launch event revealed the tension between the ideological stance that declares children and young people as competent social actors who fully participate in social life and the child protection policies that limits their autonomy. Skelton (2008) argues that many institutions and researchers themselves face a conceptual and ethical tension between seeing children and young people as competent social actors, but also as subject of protection. Such a stance can leave children and young people locked between these two positions in which they are competent to make decision but when it comes to protection issues they

are unable to make judgments for themselves. Whilst the decision to exclude the children and young people from the launch event in Beirut is debatable, the remedial action to produce a video and screen it during the launch event appears to have been a reasonable solution in balancing a number of conflicting organisational imperatives. In the *Dhaka* case study, respondents reported that staff members evaluated a series of sensitive security issues and agreed that these were not relevant concerns as the research topic was not complex in nature and the political situation in the country was stable. The examples provided could be interpreted as a reflection of the power and control that organisations have over the young researchers. Furthermore, research participants indicate that there are many other forms of power imbalances faced by children and young people, including relations amongst peers. This matter emerged from the fieldwork data and is discussed next.

### **7.3 Power relations amongst children and young people**

From my initial observations focusing on interactions of the young researchers in the two case studies, issues of power and control appeared to be absent or minimal within the groups. However, later I noticed that there were certain issues evident amongst the young researchers. My early assessment was based on my knowledge that World Vision has in place policies regarding inclusion and equal participation opportunities for all with a special focus on gender equality and reaching the most vulnerable, which seems to mitigate many issues of power (World Vision, 2015). Documentation from a large body of literature shows that children and young people exhibit power differences based on class, age group, gender, ethnicity, linguistic skills

and popularity (e.g. Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008; Morrow, 2009; Spyrou, 2011; De Graeve, 2015; Sharpe, 2015). When, I asked young researchers about these differences and how it affected their participation, the most common answer was that they considered each other as equals and hence everyone had the same opportunity to participate. I then asked the adult facilitators the same questions. A staff member from Lebanon noted:

All the factors around gender or ethnicity were not relevant for this project. I can say that the main vulnerability was the refugee situation. However, I think that this vulnerability was in favour of the children and the recognition of their research [as] many more people were interested in the report. (Kamal, staff member, *Bekaa and Irbid* case study)

In this quote, Kamal is unaware of the existence of a gender gap between participants when it is evident that in patriarchal societies, like the Lebanese and Syrian, gender is strongly connected to power relations and has an impact on boys' and girls' everyday decisions (e.g. Lewis, 2012; Anani, 2013). This shows that some staff members are unaware of gender disparities impacting children and young people since they have not adequately sensitised and trained. Furthermore, Kamal articulated that ethnicity was not a relevant negative factor within the project; however, Syrian refugee children frequently complain about discriminatory attitudes they experience in their interactions with host communities. It appears that ethnicity was not an issue amongst the young researchers themselves, but it clearly was a challenge in their interactions with others. Interestingly, Kamal saw ethnicity as a positive factor as the international community and media was reportedly fascinated



by the way a group of Syrian refugee children were able to conduct their own research in a quality fashion. However, Kamal argued that ethnicity was not an issue within the Syrian young researchers but it is an enormous barrier between the Syrian and Lebanese population in general.

Kamal and other staff members explained that the young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study were a more or less heterogeneous group of Syrian refugee children who settled in host communities around the Bekaa Valley. However, they did identify nationality and language as challenging during the child-led research project. For instance, staff members invited a group of Lebanese children and young people members of the Children's Council who previously engaged in child-led research initiatives to share this experience and to transfer their skills to the Syrian children. However, in the first session, facilitators noticed that there were significant power imbalances between the two groups. On the one hand, the Lebanese children and young people were mainly bilingual and well-trained young researchers. The Syrian children, however, were poor, monolingual and disempowered due to their refugee status. They reported feeling observed, scared and undermined by the group of well-connected and empowered Lebanese children.

The initial plan of the Lebanese children and young people to lead the sessions and train the Syrian children on how to conduct research was reassessed and the decision taken to decrease the Lebanese young people's participation in order to avoid any potential damage to the activity. The fact that the Lebanese children and young people have a network of peers who were part of a constituency and had previous experience negotiating and sharing power with adults marked a

major difference from the Syrian children who lacked those opportunities. This reflects similar findings to those of Konstantoni (2013) who found in her research in the UK that children and young people can reinforce exclusion and discrimination based on their peer relations and social identities, especially from those who are part of a dominant group and feel that they have some power over the others. Regarding issues of power amongst young researchers in the *Dhaka* case study, a staff member from Bangladesh noted:

There are some gender issues that we don't cover because they are normal for us. We don't have ethnic issues like in India. We don't get complicated about the ethnicity in Bangladesh, we don't make differences. Dhaka as the capital city is a mix of different types of people, but we don't have tensions. The issues are there, but we don't touch them, and we keep it quiet. (Suji, staff member, *Dhaka* case study)

Similar to Kamal, Suji was unable to identify significant differences and challenges in child participants' identities that could affect their engagement in participatory activities. She acknowledged the prevalence of gender and ethnic issues in her country but explained that they were not addressed in depth by the project, as they were part of people's everyday lives. This reflection can be contrasted to evidence from other studies that suggest children and young people experience multiple layers of power relations. These are reproduced within their research and affect participation according to their social standing (e.g. Kellett 2005, Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008; Spyrou, 2011; Mohajan, 2014; Shier, 2015).

When I asked about the ethnic composition of the child participants, staff members pointed out that the young researchers came from similar ethnic and

economic background. Despite these similarities, observational data showed that there were other multiple differences amongst the participants that intersect with power such as religion, gender and language during the session where the young researchers interacted with one another. A girl from the *Dhaka* case study, for instance, was isolated from the group, as the field note below illustrates:

Children and young people are enjoying their company. They are smiling and making jokes. There is one veiled girl. She is alone and no one talks to her. I thought she was shy, but I then noticed that she was extroverted and sociable. I was told later that the use of veil marks a difference between the children, especially in the interaction between the girls themselves and the boys. (Excerpt from field notes, 20 April 2016)

Observational data revealed that there were some many differences between young researchers based on their identity such as their religions. For instance, the Muslim girl had a more difficult task to negotiate being heard within the group. Her peers treated her differently as she was the only one wearing a veil. Non-veiled girls were more active in the discussion and dominated the conversation: the veiled girl only spoke when asked. On the other hand, boys in the group might receive preferential treatment based on gender, but can be discriminated against on other grounds, such as age and lack of language abilities. The bilingual participants who happened to be girls undermined the youngest boys and those who did not speak English. In the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, the young researchers experienced some limitations in their ability to engage in the child-led research process according to their gender. For instance, girls faced more restrictions in term of free movement and interactions with their male counterparts (Lewis, 2012). For instance, they could not go alone to

interview people and were thus paired with another young female researcher and a female adult supervisor. Gender also appears to frame their attitudes towards the research in terms of engaging in different phases and choosing their roles during the project, from the design to dissemination stages (Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008). I recalled from my own notes:

Girls volunteered to write the questionnaire and prepared the materials for the fieldwork. Boys wanted to do interviews in the field, but girls were more reluctant. Many of the girls volunteered to write the report, as this task was considered more intellectual. When they were dividing themselves for media interviews, boys and girls showed the same level of interest. Bilingual children were always nominated to represent the group. (Excerpt from field notes, 23 April 2016)

Young researchers divided their roles in different stages of the research process, for instance some of them were writers, interviewers, data analysts and spokespeople. The choice of who performed what functions was often made by self-selection, but in some cases by voting. Certain roles associated with high-level responsibilities created power hierarchies amongst participants. Some felt that other young researchers were at a different decision-making level and played a more important role in negotiating power relations. Schäfer and Yarwood (2008) found similar results where they observe that children and young people holding powerful positions whilst others are perceived as powerless. Interview data from my study showed that adult facilitators made significant efforts to encourage young researchers to take similar roles and participate on an equal basis. However, the challenges are beyond the methodologies developed by the adult facilitations, as these issues were deeply

embedded in the traditions and cultures of the children and young people. Tahi, a staff member from Bangladesh noted:

We have a good gender approach that we follow strictly. Boys and girls must have the same opportunities to participate and to lead. We aim for equal participation. But still there are problems with families; they say to their girls 'you can't go because [it] will be boys there' and so on ... We intentionally try to remove all gender barriers and treat all boys and girls equally. We need to educate the parents and communities. (Tahi, staff member, Bangladesh)

In this quote, Tahi reflected on the gender approach that World Vision has in order to remove barriers that perpetuate gender inequalities. She pointed out that they ensure an equal opportunity to participate to everyone but recognised that major challenges remain at the family and community level. There was no evidence from the data to indicate that girls were asked to leave the project by their parents based on their gender. However, observational data indicated that gender identity had an impact on young researchers' interactions with their peers, limiting girls' roles in some cases. However, according to staff members a potential case is always assessed and resolved in order to mitigate any negative impact in the abilities of boys and girls to participate. This reflects Konstantoni's (2012) research that indicates that stereotypes on the ground of gender or other identities can lead to discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes when are not adequately identified and addressed. For instance, in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, girls from conservative communities experience restriction of movement. In almost all cases, girls – but not boys – must seek their parents' approval to leave the house to participate in community activities, limiting their social life and peer interactions (Lewis, 2012).

### **7.3.1 Section conclusion**

This section discussed the power relations among the children and young people who engaged in child-led research projects in the two case studies. First, I examined the tension between the local and the refugee children and how this affected the implementation of the project. Initially, child and adult respondents did not recognise issues of power and discriminatory attitudes among the young researchers, as these were normalised by the participants since they were embedded in their traditions. The section explored issues of gender, language, religion and ethnicity that may have prevented children and young people from participating. Data from this study shows that some children and young people faced a certain degree of discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes based on gender, religion and ethnicity that were unidentified by the adult facilitators, who were unaware of the power imbalances and prejudiced views that children and young people held as part of their own traditions and cultures. This raises important implications for adult facilitators and practitioners in order to ensure that child-led research projects do not reinforce social inequalities and unfair power dynamics amongst children and young people.

## 7.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter contributed to answer the Question 1 by exploring the experiences of children and young people in child-led research projects and analysing the relationships between both the young researchers and their adult facilitators and amongst the young researchers themselves, and how these interactions had an impact on the child-led research projects. The chapter discussed the role of adult facilitators and how their personal characteristics, plus the bonds and relationships they established, were critical to the success of the child-led research projects. While staff members and young researchers claim that the role of adults is to facilitate rather than manage, which is interpreted as a sense of freedom and absence of control or minimal adult authority, the findings show that there is in actuality a blurred line between the organisation's and young researchers' respective agendas. The adult facilitators' and young researchers' relationships brought to the discussion the fact that the child-led research could also be considered a more collaborative or co-produced project rather than entirely child-led in the case the adult facilitator engages in a more active or managerial role.

Regarding emotions and relationships, findings from this study show that the young researchers and adult facilitators developed relationships that made an impact on the commitment of young researchers to remain engaged in the project for the long term. As such they enjoy their experiences as part of the group and according to the respondents, these valuable experiences contribute to the success of the child-led research projects. This resonates with Lundy and colleagues (2011)

who point out that participation processes include interconnected components such as the involvement of adults with children and young people and the exchange in mutual learning that increase skills and knowledge for both, the adults and children and young people.

Based on the data gathered from interviews and focus groups, these interactions interconnect with the long-term engagement of young researchers and the learning processes as a result of the positive relationship between the adult facilitators and the young researchers. The positive experiences and outcomes are consistent in both case studies, in which the research participants suggest that the roles and support of the adult facilitators are paramount to their successes. However, these relationships are not exempt from tensions and dilemmas as results of different views about children and young people's participation. Furthermore, I discussed how children and young people are treated as competent social actors, with the understanding that they need support and guidance. This recognition challenges the traditional roles of those working with children and young people and also brings thought-provoking issues to the discussion, such as negotiating authority and dealing with power decisions within different stages of the child-led process.

One of the recurring themes reflected in this study is the tension between the ability of the young researchers to make decisions and limitations they face when adults facilitators make decision for them based on the premise of safety and protection. This might weaken young researchers' option to influence decision-making, as they are not able to fully participate in important decisions that can shape some outcomes of their projects. The power relations amongst the children and



young people during the child-led research projects, including factors such as age, gender, religion, language and ethnicity is also highlighted. Adult facilitators tended to ignore these issues through interviews but observational data and conversations with young researchers in this study show that there were multiple uncovered power relations between the young researchers themselves. Although, the tendency to negate these differences could exacerbate inequality in participation.

This has been the final substantive findings chapter of this thesis. The next chapter offers a conclusion to the thesis; summarises findings and looks at implications for literature, policy, practice and future research.

# CHAPTER

# EIGHT

## 8 Conclusion

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### 8.1 Introduction

Understanding the meaning, process and impact of child-led research as an approach for children and young people's participation has been the subject of frequent discussion over the last decade (e.g. Woodhouse, 2003; Kellett, 2005; Newell et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2014; Thomas, 2015). However, despite advances in exploring children and young people's engagement in child-led research, there is still very limited evidence of the scope and boundaries of this approach and the impact that child-led research has on enhancing children and young people's opportunities to participate in the public arena and contribute to decision-making (Fleming 2011). Therefore, the starting point for this PhD study was to make a contribution to understand the gaps in knowledge around the claims and impacts of child-led research. These issues were investigated by studying the experiences of children and young people who claimed they conducted child-led research on issues relevant to them and used their findings to make a change in their lives. The aim of this research was to critically explore how the processes and outcomes of children and young

people's participation in child-led research contribute, positively or negatively, to international development decision-making processes. The following research questions shaped the study:

**Question 1:** What are children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research as a way to influence decision-making?

**Question 2:** What are the processes of child-led research that positively or negatively influence decision-making?

**Question 3:** In what ways does child-led research influence decision-making? (And why and how do they do so?)

These queries guided this qualitative research project, which utilised several methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, documentary review and participant observation. In order to answer the research questions, I opted to use a case study approach with two case studies, *Bekaa and Irbid* and *Dhaka*, as the most appropriate method in order to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the child-led research and the individuals who participated. I conducted the fieldwork over nine months, from November 2015 to July 2016. The research participants included children and young people, aged 12 to 18, who were associated with World Vision programmes and engaged in child-led research projects and the adult professionals who acted as facilitators.

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings based on the three research questions and then discusses their implications for literature, policy and practice.

Afterwards, I explore future research endeavours and conclude with reflections on the child-led research journey, from both practitioner and academic perspectives.

## **8.2 Summary of findings**

### **8.2.1 Question 1**

**What are children and young people's motivations for, expectations of and experiences with engaging in their own child-led research as a way to influence decision-making?**

The concept of children and young people's participation outlined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and reinforced by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 12, promotes an understanding of participation that moves away from merely taking part in or being present at activities to one that embraces engagement in decision-making processes on issues that affect their lives (Tisdall, 2014). Literature suggests that children and young people's motivation to participate is influenced by their desire to be part of a group, meet peers, make new friends, learn skills, receive support from adults and have space to express their views (e.g. Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008; Ansell et al., 2012; Thomas, 2012; Shier, 2017). Their motivations are also based on the conviction that their views will be taken into account and their collective work can make an impact on their lives (e.g. Kellett, 2005; Brownlie et al., 2006; Fleming, 2011).

The children and young people from the chosen case studies stated that they became involved in these child-led research projects because they gave them a space to participate, a chance to make their views heard and an opportunity to influence

decision-making on issues affecting their lives and the lives of their peers. Data from this study confirmed that when engaging in their own child-led research, children and young people's motivations and expectations were to make an impact on their own lives, as well as the lives of their peers and change a situation that they perceived as unfair. As underlined in section 6.3, evidence from this research showed that the participating children and young people joined the projects based on their personal interest in exploring issues pertinent to their daily lives. They became involved with the intent to find information, generate knowledge and use their findings to influence people in power in order to make a difference in their lives. They were also interested in developing new skills, acquiring new information, making friends and being part of a group of peers with whom they share common experiences and joint goals. These motivations were consistent in both case studies, with research participants suggesting that their overriding motivations to become young researchers and stay involved in the projects were to learn new things, take collective action and influence others. This finding complements other research about the relevance of motivation in enhancing children and young people's participation in child-led research (e.g. Kellett, 2010; Shier, 2015, Kim, 2016) and Alderson's (2008) assertion that children and young people often engage in this process to contribute to changes in society and ensure the realisation of their rights.

Research participants agreed that one of the factors that kept them motivated and engaged in the child-led research projects was the presence of the adult facilitators who established bonds and constructive relationships with them. These relationships made a positive impact on the young researchers' commitment

to remain involved in the projects for the long term, as they perceived their contributions to be supported and valued. The young researchers considered the adult facilitators to be resourceful, supportive and a crucial part of the project. However, the active role of adult facilitators in these child-led research projects raised a number of methodological, ethical and epistemological questions as discussed in Chapter Seven. For instance, three critical aspects were highlighted: (a) the thin line between facilitating and managing young researchers, (b) the way that emotions and relationships are built between adult facilitators and children and young people and (c) the ideological positions that produce some tension between the right to participate and the right to protection.

In this particular research, the difference between facilitation and management was critical in defining the processes as ‘child-led’ as discussed in section 7.2.1. Findings from this research show that in both case studies, the adult facilitators played an important role in facilitating the young researchers but not managing them. The young researchers argued that they had control over the decisions throughout the different research stages and adults only acted as facilitators (e.g. sections 5.3.2 and 7.2.2). The emphasis on the role of adults as facilitators resonates with the literature that stresses that most participatory processes are essentially relational and dependent upon skilled adult facilitators who guide participants through supportive engagement while restraining from directing or managing them (e.g. Kina, 2012; Martin et al., 2015; Shier, 2015). Adult facilitators who supported the young researchers agreed that the guidance and facilitation they provided, as well as the assurance that the control over the research remained with

the young researchers, were paramount to the success of the child-led research. This echoes Lundy's (2007) position that considers the cooperation of skilled and well-trained adults a critical factor in ensuring the application of Article 12 of the UNCRC, which recognises children and young people as competent social actors who have the right to influence decision-making processes. However, these competencies need to be supported by providing adequate information, guidance and resources to make the process relevant to the participants.

Findings from this study show that the adult facilitators and young researchers built relationships upon emotional bonds and interactions, which were strengthened by the experiences they shared throughout the length of the project as examined in section 7.2. As a result, the children and young people stayed engaged in their projects over time, as they felt valued and supported based on the close connections they developed with their facilitators. Evidence suggests that the adult facilitators positioned themselves as part of the participatory process and not as an external party, which enabled these bonds in all probability. This focus on the relationships resonates with the literature that highlights that adult facilitators need to invest time and effort to develop rapport and build relationships of mutual trust and equal respect with children and young people (e.g. Alderson, 2008; Percy-Smith, 2011; Lansdown and O'Kane, 2014). In the same line, Pinkney (2011) argues that adults working with children and young people are required to deal with issues in relation to emotions in order to be able to communicate effectively, especially around sensitive issues. For instance, the closure phase is critical, as children and young people need to be aware of the end of the project, which may imply that they

will not see the adult facilitators anymore or they will no longer work with them directly. These findings confirm the need to recruit suitable adult facilitators who are well trained to deal with the emotional and relational components of participatory processes in order to ensure a project's long-term success. This might imply the development of innovative selection criteria to change the way staff members work with children and young people.

The presented study found manifestations of power amongst the children and young people during the child-led research projects, which were based on age, gender, religion, language and ethnicity. As discussed in sections 7.3 and 5.3.2, these multiple, yet uncovered power relations amongst the young researchers were unseen by the adult facilitators as they were not aware of them. This resonates with Konstantoni (2013) who argues that children and young people can reproduce discriminatory attitudes and views towards their peers based on several grounds, resulting in potentially excluding those who are different. This confirms evidence from other studies that suggest that children and young people can replicate power relations within their participatory projects, which are deeply embedded in their traditions and cultures (e.g. Spyrou, 2011; Mohajan, 2014; Shier, 2015). The two case studies discussed in this research project are enlightening in terms of the opportunities that the young researchers had in using child-led research as a vehicle to participate and be part of decision-making processes. However, this approach needs to address concerns about inclusivity and accessibility in relation to who is included and excluded from these processes, and to find ways to ensure wider coverage and access, particularly those who are hard to reach due to vulnerabilities



and disadvantages. As discussed in section 3.4.2., a reflexive account, I reflected on the different levels of power and inequality amongst the young researchers and discovered that it is critical to see them beyond a vulnerable position and not only focus on their possible deprived situation, but explore how they perceive themselves and what are their own strategies for overcoming the obstacles to participate in an equal basis with their peers.

This research project evidenced some tensions between participation and protection rights, which were reflected in the executive decisions made by the adult facilitators as part of their mandate to protect the children and young people. One such instance was when the facilitators chose to exclude the young researchers from a dissemination event in order to protect them from possible harm. This finding exemplifies the complexities of child-adult relationships. A key position of the child-led research approach is that children and young people are competent social actors entitled to express their views and be heard, yet this is challenged in the face of factors such as child protection mandates and potentially competing agendas of the young researchers and supporting organisations. This reflects the literature on the ethical dilemmas of balancing participation while ensuring safety, which highlights the tension between participation and protection that could weaken the concept of children and young people as competent social actors by excluding them from decisions about their safety (e.g. Hart and Tyrer, 2006; Morrow, 2008; Skelton, 2008). Lundy (2007) argues that this discussion needs to consider the analysis of provisions such as best interests, right to guidance and protection from abuse; however, adults' decisions cannot limit children and young people's participation only on the belief

they are protecting children and young people. This reveals that it is important to encourage child-led research participants to explore and acknowledge potential dilemmas using, for instance, reflexivity as a means to understand these issues and find alternatives to address any challenges, especially in regards to the roles of adult facilitators and young researchers.

### **8.2.2 Question 2**

**What are the processes of child-led research that positively or negatively influence decision-making?**

Percy-Smith (2010) argues that a major focus of the research agenda surrounding children and young people's participation has been devoted to the study of participation in political and public decision-making processes, privileging the discussion around formal structures, such as children's parliaments or councils. As such, Percy-Smith advocates for a reorientation in participatory opportunities towards actions, initiatives and contributions that children and young people can make in their everyday community spaces, such as homes, schools and neighbourhoods. The findings of this research project show that children and young people engage in child-led research as a vehicle to participate in a collective process within their communities in order to contribute to changes in their lives.

In both case studies, young researchers adopted child-led research as an approach that enabled them to gather and pursue research and explore issues that affect their lives by using research methodologies suitable to their experiences and abilities. The young researchers explored the lives of children and young people by

collecting information from their peers and generating new information based on the data gathered. They also examined their own lives, reflected on their experiences and included them in their analyses. This research project found that the young researchers had opportunities to connect with their peers in an ordinary way of communicating and this allowed them to explore issues differently than an adult would, and produce data that merged their peers' experiences with their own. As outlined in section 5.2, this study shows that children and young people who engaged in child-led research brought new perspectives, including their personal experiences, to the subject matter, enabling them to outline the focus of the chosen research topic, explore the problems that affect their lives and understand the issues.

My research project supports the view that child-led research generates empirically grounded knowledge as discussed in sections 5.3 and 7.2. The young researchers collected data using a variety of methods and subsequently analysed it by reflecting on their own experiences and expertise in order to understand the issues affecting them. Underpinning this is the idea that children and young people have the competencies to engage in research, but the difficulty seems to be in agreeing what constitutes and what is valued as knowledge. When contrasting the generation of scientific knowledge with the knowledge produced by the young researchers, questions arise about the value of knowledge generated by children and young people. In discussing what information is considered knowledge, Lincoln and Guba (2000) developed a set of criteria to scrutinise research based on four factors: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The major challenge here is to determine whether we can use the same criteria to examine knowledge

produced by child-led research projects. From the findings in this study, I argue that this is unnecessary, as one of the major contributions of child-led research is the generation of knowledge through data collection and personal experiences and its analysis as a whole. Thus, child-led research is a valuable approach that recognises and embraces the abilities, skills and expertise of children and young people to generate knowledge, challenging traditional views that hold the belief that knowledge generation is only applicable when involving professional researchers.

Child-led research follows in the footsteps of participatory action and feminist studies, which have shown how ordinary people engage in the co-production of knowledge alongside professional researchers by contributing their own experiences with the aim of transforming themselves and making changes in institutions and systems (e.g. Hordijk and Baud, 2006; Dold and Chapman, 2012; Rayaprol, 2016). These participatory approaches are developed to provide marginalised populations opportunities to engage in collaborative research projects that present their underrepresented perspectives and produce new participant-constructed knowledge, which potentially could bring about change (e.g. Breitbart, 2003; Cahill, 2007; Cornwall and Fujita, 2012). The evidence from my research strongly suggests that child-led research goes further than participatory research, as the young researchers do not rely on a professional researcher to manage the project. The children and young people from both case studies led their own research and made relevant decisions, from defining the research questions to implementation and reporting. They received support from an adult facilitator who assisted but did not direct them; hence, this assistance did not undermine the process as pointed out by

the research participants. To sum up, child-led research is research, not only a participatory methodology, which is used to generate empirically grounded knowledge on issues investigated by young researchers. This feature distinguishes this particular approach and contributes to the creation of new participation opportunities for children and young people, where they use their findings to engage and influence decision makers on issues relevant to them. The evidence that young researchers bring to the debate gives them the confidence to speak out and challenge those with power, whether they are policy makers, civil society actors or community leaders.

This resonates with Shier (2015) who argues that children and young people have demonstrated that they have the capacity to generate new knowledge and contribute to improving their conditions “just as the best adult researchers do” (p215). However, a number of challenges remain unanswered, such as the issue of power, ethics and critical analysis. For instance, the power differences between the young researchers and young interviewees can affect knowledge generation and possibly exclude some views or experiences, the young researchers may be unable to identify and address ethics considerations (e.g. consent, anonymity and confidentiality); and the young researchers may lack some of the skills needed to critically interpret the data. While recognising these limitations, literature points out that these issues can be addressed by providing appropriate capacity-building strategies to equip children and young people with the necessary skills and tools (e.g. Spalding, 2012; Blanchet-Cohen, 2013; Martin et al., 2015).

The children and young people from these two case studies identified themselves as young researchers as they felt confident about the process they undertook and the competencies they acquired to carry out their tasks. This ability to lead helped them define themselves as researchers and to call their work, child-led research. Child-led research projects from both case studies show that children and young people are able and keen to lead research processes when support is provided and having the conviction that this approach will potentially ensure that adults will listen to them and take their views seriously.

Regarding the characteristics of the processes of child-led research that contribute to influence decision-making, the findings, as discussed in sections 5.3 and 6.4, indicate that the use of adequate methodologies and procedures was essential to equip the young researchers with the skills and tools required to carry out research suitable to their experience, ability and context. These factors helped them to feel confident on their findings, as they were able to produce useful data that mirrored their experiences and use them to influence stakeholders and decision makers. The next section will discuss the ways the young researchers used their findings to influence decision-making and whether they succeeded in their actions.

### **8.2.3 Question 3**

**In what ways does child-led research influence decision-making? (And why and how do they do so?)**

This study explored the impact that these particular child-led research projects had on decision-making and the strategies the young researchers and supporting

organisation envisioned. The impact of children and young people's participation on decision-making has been widely discussed in literature as this is one of key features of their right to participate as outlined in the General Comment No. 12 (e.g. Jans, 2004; Percy-Smith, 2011; Thomas 2012; Tisdall, 2013). However, the impact on the engagement of children and young people in child-led research has been less documented (Fleming, 2011). Shier (2015) argues that the relationship between knowledge generation and its eventual influence over social change and decision-making makes it challenging to measure and demonstrate the impact of the work accomplished by young researchers.

Findings from this project show that young researchers from both case studies developed knowledge exchange strategies, which they considered pivotal to ensuring the eventual use of the data and its potential impact on decision-making. In the case of *Bekaa and Irbid*, the strategy was more adult-led and in *Dhaka*, it was more child-driven. Furthermore, this research project sheds light on the importance of having knowledge exchange strategies in place to ensure that findings are used to promote change, as young researchers cited this as one of their primary motivations to join the projects. This resonates with Morton's (2015) model for knowledge exchange, which identifies the relationship between the researchers and the end-users of the results as critical to ensuring that research makes an impact. This implies that in order to succeed in this exchange process, one condition must be that the recipients of the research findings are committed and interested in using them to introduce change.

The *Dhaka* case study participants targeted local decision makers, and this led to the extensive dissemination of their findings across their networks and the media to reach those people they wished to influence. The *Bekaa and Irbid* case study focused on a global audience since the young researchers believed that global actors could play a bigger role in improving child refugees' lives. The contexts in which the child-led research projects were conducted and disseminated were very different as was their impact. This was evident in Bangladesh where the young researchers perceived immediate changes as a result of their research as local authorities made clear commitments to use their findings to improve services. However, the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study participants experienced more limitations in their ability to interact directly with possible research users, as they mainly used the media to disseminate their findings. This generated increased awareness-raising regarding their situations as child refugees, but did not produce any perceived impact on their daily lives, according to the respondents. For instance, the young researchers reported continued bullying and violence at school. This shows that the more localised and focused the topic, as in the *Dhaka* case, and the better the dissemination plan, the more useful the research findings are in influencing actions for change. The more international the approach, as in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case, leads to a more diffuse and unrecognised change.

Whilst the knowledge exchange strategies used by the young researchers may differ from those used by conventional researchers, this study found some commonalities. They suggest that the level of impact of the research depends on the direct dissemination efforts, interactions between researchers and research users,



and looking at social influences, such as relying on powerful people who can help to sway others (e.g. Nutley et al., 2009; Morton 2015). The findings from this research show the importance of effective direct dialogue between young researchers and research users. For instance, when stakeholders and decision makers engaged directly with the young researchers, the chances for the children and young people to be heard and influence others increased as these direct dialogues built trust and confidence that they were conveying their own ideas and not those of others. Analysis from the *Bekaa and Irbid* study shows that some of the young researchers were disappointed with the minimal impact that their research made on improving their situations as refugees. However, this negative perception came from the lack of feedback they received on how their child-led research findings were used. This echoes scholarly findings that argue that one of the major concerns about participatory initiatives is improving feedback mechanisms and managing children and young people's expectations (e.g. Alderson, 2001; Lundy, 2007; Skelton, 2008; Tisdall, 2014; Sharpe, 2015).

The child-led research in these two case studies initially intended to have an impact on decision-making processes and did not plan to influence changes within World Vision, the supporting organisation (see section 6.4.1). However, the child-led research project unintentionally resulted in some positive outcomes that had an impact on wider operations. In particular, findings show that the child-led research positively affected organisational programming, which now includes child-led research as a recommended methodology for engaging children and young people in decision-making.

Evidence from this study also confirms that child-led research had an impact on the individual lives of the young researchers as discussed in section 6.4. The children and young people reported positive changes in their own lives as they recognised gains in self-confidence, self-esteem and being valued, supported and respected. This is consistent with Fleming's (2011) findings that show that children and young people who engage in participatory research feel valued and perceive that their views matter. In the same vein, Percy-Smith (2014) suggests that when children and young people take part in participatory initiatives they learn from others and their confidence increases as they become aware of their respective abilities. Furthermore, in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, young researchers considered their participation to be a rewarding experience that helped them to overcome the pain and trauma they suffered from as a result of difficulties due to their refugee status. Hart and Tyrer (2006) argue that when children and young people engage with each other, especially in circumstances of hardship, this engagement stimulates interpersonal communications and common feelings, which results in increasing self-confidence and a sense of personal efficacy.

Conceptually and practically, child-led research is applicable to address multiple challenges faced by children and young people in their desire to participate, including difficulties in accessing resources and the low or absent impact on decision-making. Based on the findings of this study, child-led research provides opportunities for children and young people to unpack and make tangible their right to participate as outlined by the UNCRC and facilitates platforms that bring young researchers and decision makers together in a dialogue around their findings and recommendations

for action. A positive impact on decision-making cannot be guaranteed as this relies in multiple and complex factors, but child-led research offers numerous options for influencing decisions at different levels and facilitates exchange between young researchers and decision makers and amongst the young researchers themselves. That said, one of the constraints in implementing child-led research is the imbalance of power between the young researchers and the supporting organisations that could have competing agendas and priorities. Child-led research might face ongoing and long-term criticism over a perceived lack of clarity concerning the effect of adult control on the young researchers' achievements and the claim that children and young people have expertise and skills to generate new knowledge. Whilst accepting such possible criticism, this research project argues that child-led research provides meaningful opportunities for participation, which is related to the experiences and expectations of the young researchers, and has a potential to improve the recognition of children and young people as creators of knowledge and competent actors in influencing decision-making.

### **8.3 Implications for the literature, policy and practice, and future research**

#### **8.3.1 Implications for the literature**

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the body of literature that challenges the dominant conceptualisation that children and young people are unable to conduct their own research. This negative conceptualisation is based on the belief

that they are not intellectually prepared and lack the maturity to express their views, allowing them to be easily directed by the interests of the adults or organisations that support these types of initiatives (e.g. Christensen and Prout, 2002; Fleming, 2011; Lundy et al., 2011). This study particularly focuses on children and young people who live in difficult circumstances and their engagement in child-led research to influence decision-making processes on issues that they identify as relevant to their lives. The study contributes to the substantial gap of understanding whether children and young people can generate knowledge by using the child-led research approach and how their findings are utilised towards their aims of making a change.

This study has extended the literature on children and young people's participation by exploring the competencies and abilities of the young researchers to engage in child-led research from a perspective that recognises them as competent social actors. This is in line with Punch's (2002) findings that suggest the lack of recognition of children and young people's competency relates to adults' perceptions and treatment of them in society where they are positioned in different structural categories. This resonates with scholars who argue when children and young people are seen as competent social actors, they are also seen as competent research participants as they are recognised as individuals with abilities to actively participate in research (e.g. Morrow, 2008; Fleming, 2011; Shier, 2015).

This research project also contributes to the literature on children and young people's participation by discussing the relationships, collaborations and tensions between adults and children and young people. Furthermore, Johnson (2011) states that analysis of the roles and personal characteristics of adult facilitators are

paramount to the success of any participatory initiative with children and young people, especially the examination of the dichotomy between managing and facilitating processes and features such as skills, experience and personality. This discussion contributes to a wider debate in literature on how the role of adults can support or jeopardise a child-led initiative depending on their role. Similarly, Percy-Smith (2011) argues that relationships between adults and children and young people imply continuous negotiation. Fleming (2011) suggests that to achieve an optimal relationship between the young researchers and adult facilitators, all actors involved must value the different types of experience and expertise benefiting the research project directly. In a similar line of reasoning, Davis and colleagues (2012) indicate that adults are crucial to creating enabling contexts that address conflicting issues such as age difference in order to improve adult-children relationships. By discussing these issues, this research project coincides with Kellett's (2010) view that the adults' roles are pivotal in opening opportunities for children and young people to bring to light their views and insights through child-led research. This process requires shifting the control that adult facilitators have over the young researchers, enabling them to generate knowledge with the lowest levels, or absence, of adult influence.

This study also contributes to the debate on how to think about impact of the child-led research by discussing the differences between how academic settings measure impact and the way children and young people measure the impact of their own research. As described in Chapter Six, young researchers in this study sought impact in the form of immediate changes to their lives rather than the number of

mentions their research receives in high-level policy debates, which is a way to measure academic research impact. This discussion contributes to highlighting the tensions between the processes and outcomes of participatory initiatives. This echoes Tisdall and colleagues' (2014) position that criticises processes without tangible outcomes as they can frustrate children and young people who generally join participatory initiatives in order to make a difference.

### **8.3.2 Implications for policy and practice**

This study emerged from the need for empirical evidence as to whether child-led research projects help children and young people to participate and influence decision-making through their research findings. From an international policy perspective, one of the premises outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC and General Comments No. 12 is that children and young people are entitled to be listened to and participate in decision-making processes on issues relevant to them. However, as discussed in the literature chapter, children and young people's participation is still struggling for increased implementation even though substantial advances have been documented worldwide (e.g. Davis, 2009; Lansdown, 2011; Couzens, 2012; Tisdall, 2014). This research project contributes to positive change, altering the way decision makers, policymakers and practitioners perceive children and young people, and validate children and young people's position as right-holders. This change in mindset might support the development of programmes and policies that take into account the contributions that children and young people can make to policy debates and formulation of policies. In particular, practitioners from World Vision will likely

utilise this study's results to improve methodologies and scale up existing child-led research projects to promote the engagement of children and young people in influencing decision-making.

Scholars have studied methodologies for engaging children and young people in research, including their benefits, strengths and weaknesses (e.g. Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008; Spalding, 2012; Shier, 2015; Thomas 2015). This research project built on those studies and contributes to a contextualised understanding of the opportunities and challenges that child-led research could provide as a participatory methodology that enables children and young people's participation in public life by using their findings to shape decision-making processes. This is consistent with Lundy (2007) who points out that children and young peoples' participation needs to be understood in relation to others, taking into account power inequalities generally embedded in relationships. This argument encourages organisations and practitioners to use a reflexive approach while implementing child-led research projects in order to address power issues in relationships amongst children and young people themselves. This approach ties in with Konstantoni's (2012) work that suggests that reflexivity needs to be carried out as a hallmark of ethical practice in order to recognise and mitigate the impact that stereotypes on the ground of gender, ethnicity or other identities may have in exacerbating discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes in participatory projects.

Evidence from other studies show that a shift towards participation also needs to take into consideration the specific contexts and institutional systems where children and young people live as these changes are particularly situational

(e.g. Mayal, 2000; Percy-Smith, 2011; Prout, 2011). This project's findings suggest that contexts need to be assessed, as some of them can be more or less conducive to children and young people's participation. For instance, young researchers from *Dhaka* case study had more options to be heard and to make an impact in their communities than the young researchers from *Bekaa and Irbid* case.

### **8.3.3 Implications for future research**

As McKechnie and Hobbs (2004) state, research findings reflect a particular time with a specific lens, suggesting that future research could challenge and build upon the knowledge generated by this study. This exploratory project focused on how children and young people conducted child-led research as a means to participate and influence decision-making, raising a number of opportunities for future research. The decision to focus on two case studies within international development programmes was critical to gather the in-depth data needed for this exploratory investigation. Future research could explore how children and young people not associated with international development organisations experience child-led research within different contexts. For instance, in these two case studies, the children and young people were from vulnerable populations and supported by World Vision who implements child-led research approach as one of their innovative programmes to providing spaces for and enhancing children and young people's opportunities to participate in decision-making. However, varying environments may or may not enable or facilitate the research as much as programmes and social interventions conducted by World Vision or other development programmes which are generally



supportive. A comparative perspective could explore how diverse contexts envision child-led research differently.

This project primarily focused on the views of children and young people and the adults that supported their child-led research. This study did not cover the views of the decision makers, except when discussing the German Foreign Affairs Minister's engagement with the young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study, which was analysed based on information provided by staff members. Forthcoming studies could include perspectives from decision makers and stakeholders that the young researchers wish to influence with their findings. This particular focus could explore how the dialogue between children and young people and decision makers is constructed within different cultures and settings.

There is also scope to explore how children and young people experience and understand their identities and how these can affect their engagement in child-led research and other participatory approaches. Identities are complex and multifaceted, but trends in policy and practice indicate an inclination to homogenise children and young people as one or two social categories or reduce them to a few identity levels (Konstantoni and Emejulu, 2017). Furthermore, classifications such as gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and age may have implications on children and young people's ability to interact with their peers and decision makers. These characteristics could also determine their opportunities to exercise their rights and participation in social life (Alanen, 2016; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2017). Further research could illuminate whether child-led research processes perpetuate inequalities due to a lack of an intersectional lens that could expose the

layers of similarities and differences within the children and young people's social structures (Konstantoni, 2013), which could be crucial to ensuring greater equality and inclusion across diverse contexts in the future.

## 8.4 Concluding reflections

This research project has explored the experiences of children and young people in Lebanon, Jordan and Bangladesh who claimed that they conducted child-led research in order to explore issues relevant to them and make a change in their lives based on their findings. I conclude by arguing for child-led research as an appropriate and feasible participatory approach that facilitates the engagement of children and young people in generating new knowledge on issues relevant to their lives. I came to this conclusion by examining the epistemological positions related to knowledge production and contrasting them against the child-led research conducted in the two case studies.

The young researchers generated knowledge that was in turn used to influence decision-making, successfully in the *Dhaka* case study, but with the stipulation that in the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study there was insufficient evidence to show whether their findings and recommendations led to any changes in decision-making. This reflection raises the question as to whether child-led research can only be valued if it makes an impact on decision-making or if generating knowledge independently is enough. I argue that participation is about processes and outcomes, both of which are important and one does not invalidate the other. Hence, I believe

that too much emphasis on effecting an outcome of influencing decision-making can sometimes conceal other substantial aspects of the participation process, such as acquiring new skills, learning opportunities and building relationships amongst participants, which are highly valued outcomes for children and young people. However, if a participatory project claims that its ultimate goal is to influence decision-making, this project should be evaluated based on that claim. As Percy-Smith (2011) argues, this challenges us to not only think of decision-making achievements but also reflect on the learning process for change to see where children and young people can take away a positive experience from their participation.

My interactions with the children and young people from the two case studies showed me that they were happy, felt valued and respected. Personally, as a practitioner and researcher, this research project represented an enormous contribution to my professional development as the young researchers reminded me of the need to continue working towards the implementation of their right to be heard, theoretically and practically, and find additional avenues to share their experiences with as many children and young people as possible. The children and young people I worked with firmly believe that all children and young people have the right to participate in social life and they are confident that child-led research is an approach that allows them to be part of a significant process to change their lives. My role is to integrate the empirical findings from this research, connect them to theoretical discussions and apply this new knowledge in order improve policy and practice. This work, however, needs to continue to engage children and young people

as key actors in the process in order to raise their status as competent social actors. This is a challenging journey with many achievements and setbacks, but the young researchers made it clear that this journey is necessary and worth the time and resources required.



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# Appendixes

## 10.1. Appendix A: Information and consent form for child participants



### INFORMATION FOR YOU

Hello, my name is Patricio Cuevas-Parra and I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. I am doing a research project called **"Exploring child-led research: Case studies from Bangladesh, Lebanon and Jordan"**.

*I am very interested in knowing more about the projects where you have participated.*

*I would like to invite you to participate in my research project and share your experiences and opinions about the child-led research you conducted some time ago. Your participation is important as I want to understand your project and tell others about your success, learning and ideas for improvement.*



*I will be coming along to meet you to **ask you your views**. I will do this through two ways: one-on-one interviews and focus groups interviews.*

*If you agree to participate, you can choose one of these two ways to engage. I am aware that some children and young people prefer to talk in groups and others prefer to do it alone. It is up to you.*

**Your participation is voluntary.** This means that you are free to join or not. If you decide to participate, you **have the right** to opt out of participating at any time.

*If it's OK, I will be taking notes of our conversation and I will be using tape-recording. If you don't want me to do this, just let me know.*

*When writing my report, I would like to include some of the things you say but I will not use your name. Nobody will know who say what in here.*

*However, I want to let you know that sometimes there are situations where I cannot keep things confidential, for example in case of child abuse, violence, exploitation or neglect.*

*For me it is very important that you feel OK and safe, so you can tell me when you don't feel comfortable and I will do my best to resolve these situations.*



***If you have questions, please feel free to ask me any time  
I take what you say very seriously and I will learn from you as your opinions are really important***

## CONSENT FORM



*If you want to participate in this research project, please fill out this form. If you agree with the statement tick the box, if you disagree don't tick the box.*

- ☐ *I understand the information given about this project*
- ☐ *I agree to participate and to share my experiences and views about our project*
- ☐ *I am OK to have the conversation recorded*
- ☐ *I am Ok that the researcher take some written notes*
- ☐ *I understand that I am free to opt out at any time*
- ☐ *I understand that my personal information is confidential*

*My name is.....*

*My age is.....*

*My signature.....*

*Date.....*

*Name and signature of the researcher.....*

### **More information**

*If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me at: [P.Cuevas-Parra@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:P.Cuevas-Parra@sms.ed.ac.uk)*

*If you want to ask further questions or wish to make a complaint, please contact: Kay Tisdall, University of Edinburgh, at [K.Tisdall@ed.ac.uk](mailto:K.Tisdall@ed.ac.uk)*

## 10.2. Appendix B: Information and consent form for adult participants

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET

<b>Name of the study</b>	Exploring child-led research: Case studies from Bangladesh, Lebanon and Jordan
<b>Name of researcher</b>	Patricio Cuevas-Parra
<b>Date</b>	June, 2015

#### INVITATION

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. The data from this study will form part of my PhD degree in Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh. You have been invited to participate based on your expertise on the field of child participation.

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore whether child-led research is an effective method of supporting children and young people to shape their environment by influencing decision-making on issues that are relevant to their daily lives.

#### VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

You have the right not have to take part on this study; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in anyway. You have the right to ask all the questions that you consider relevant and the researcher has the obligation to answer your questions satisfactorily. If you decide to take part you be asked to sign a consent form. You have the right to withdraw from the study without giving any reason. You are free to stop your participation and to have your data withdrawn without giving any reason up to September, 2016.

#### FORMAT

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and be based on several interview questions. The researcher will take notes by hand and will be using voice recorder. You have the right to ask not be voice-recorded.

#### RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in the study.

#### BENEFITS

The information collected from the study will help to influence current and future research on the intersection between child-led research, child participation and decision-making.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will ensure strictly confidentiality. All data for analysis will be anonymised. In reporting on the research findings, Participants will be identified just by their gender and generic role.

**You will be given a copy of this participant information leaflet to keep and refer to at any time.  
Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.**

## RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Name of the study	Exploring child-led research: Case studies from Bangladesh, Lebanon and Jordan
Name of researcher	Patricio Cuevas-Parra
Date	June, 2015

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. I will explain the project to you before you agree to take part. Please tick or initial box to state each statement to confirm your agreement to the following statements:

- ☐ I confirm that I have been given enough and clear information about the study.
- ☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- ☐ It has been explain to me how the information I give will be used.
- ☐ I agree to take part in the study and talk to the researcher about the topic.
- ☐ I understand that I can leave at any time and do not have to answer all the questions if I don't want to.
- ☐ I agree that the researcher can take notes about I say.
- ☐ I agree to be voice-recorded by the interviewer
- ☐ I give permission to use my direct quotations in a report and subsequent research outputs but understand that my name and contact details will not be mentioned

**You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep and refer to at any time.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant                      Date                      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of researcher                      Date                      Signature

### **Further information**

*If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me at: [P.Cuevas-Parra@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:P.Cuevas-Parra@sms.ed.ac.uk)*

*If you have further questions or you wish to make a complaint, please contact:*

### 10.3. Appendix C: Participants List

<b>Bekaa and Irbid case study</b>			
<b>Children and young people</b>			
<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age or role</b>	<b>Country</b>
1. Abdulla	M	18	Lebanon
2. Farid	M	17	Lebanon
3. Aisha	F	15	Lebanon
4. Almira	F	15	Lebanon
5. Amal	F	16	Lebanon
6. Dalia	F	14	Lebanon
7. Abir	F	16	Lebanon
8. Fatima	F	13	Lebanon
9. Jamila	F	16	Lebanon
10. Hanadi	F	16	Lebanon
11. Ferran	M	14	Jordan
12. Jabbar	M	12	Jordan
13. Jamel	M	14	Jordan
14. Malik	M	14	Jordan
15. Safa	F	14	Jordan
16. Samirah	F	16	Jordan
17. Tahirah	F	13	Jordan
18. Zada	F	14	Jordan
<b>Adult professionals</b>			
19. Jumanah	F	n/a	Lebanon
20. Kamal	M	n/a	Lebanon
21. Roula	F	n/a	Lebanon
22. Karl	M	n/a	Germany
23. Maha	F	n/a	Jordan
24. Susan	M	n/a	USA
25. Marie	M	n/a	Jordan
26. Camilla	F	n/a	USA
<b>Dhaka case study</b>			
<b>Children and young people</b>			
<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Country</b>
27. Aalok	M	15	Bangladesh
28. Abhoy	M	14	Bangladesh
29. Chaitan	M	13	Bangladesh
30. Chandan	M	16	Bangladesh
31. Falgun	M	16	Bangladesh
32. Fanish	M	14	Bangladesh
33. Kajal	M	12	Bangladesh
34. Kanai	M	12	Bangladesh
35. Amba	F	13	Bangladesh
36. Aashi	F	13	Bangladesh
37. Dipu	F	12	Bangladesh
38. Diya	F	14	Bangladesh
39. Faria	F	13	Bangladesh
40. Gita	F	16	Bangladesh
41. Jaina	F	15	Bangladesh
42. Mana	F	16	Bangladesh
<b>Adult professionals</b>			
43. Piyal	F	n/a	Bangladesh

44. Suji	F	n/a	Bangladesh
45. Tuhi	F	n/a	Bangladesh
46. Ravi	M	n/a	Bangladesh

#### 10.4. Appendix D: Interview schedule

Opening Welcome and warming up			
Themes	Main questions		Probes and Prompts
Information on the processes of participation	Q1	What is your view about children's participation in decision-making process?	Can you give me an example?  What are the principles outlined in your answer?
	Q2	In your opinion, what are the challenges that children face when they want to influence decision-making concerning issues that are relevant to them?	In order to understand better the opportunities and challenges you described, can you please explain the restricting and enabling factors that affect their participation?
	Q3	In your opinion, what are the methods that can be used to facilitate the involvement of children in decision-making?	Written, verbal, visual methods? Any other method?
	Q4	I am aware that you are familiar with child-led research initiatives. Do you think that child-led research is a good opportunity for children to engage in decision-making processes?	Why do you think this is good? Why is bad? In your opinion, what competencies do children require to conduct their own research?  What kind of support and resources do children need to conduct child-led research?
Information on the outcomes of participation	Q5	Do you think that the involvement of children on child-led research can direct to any changes to decision-making?	If yes, can you please give concrete examples? If no please outline briefly the reasons.  What kind of changes? Decisions, attitudes and practices?
	Q6	How can children use their findings and recommendations to influence decision-making processes?	How can this impact be measured?  Do you think that their participation can have an impact in decision-making?

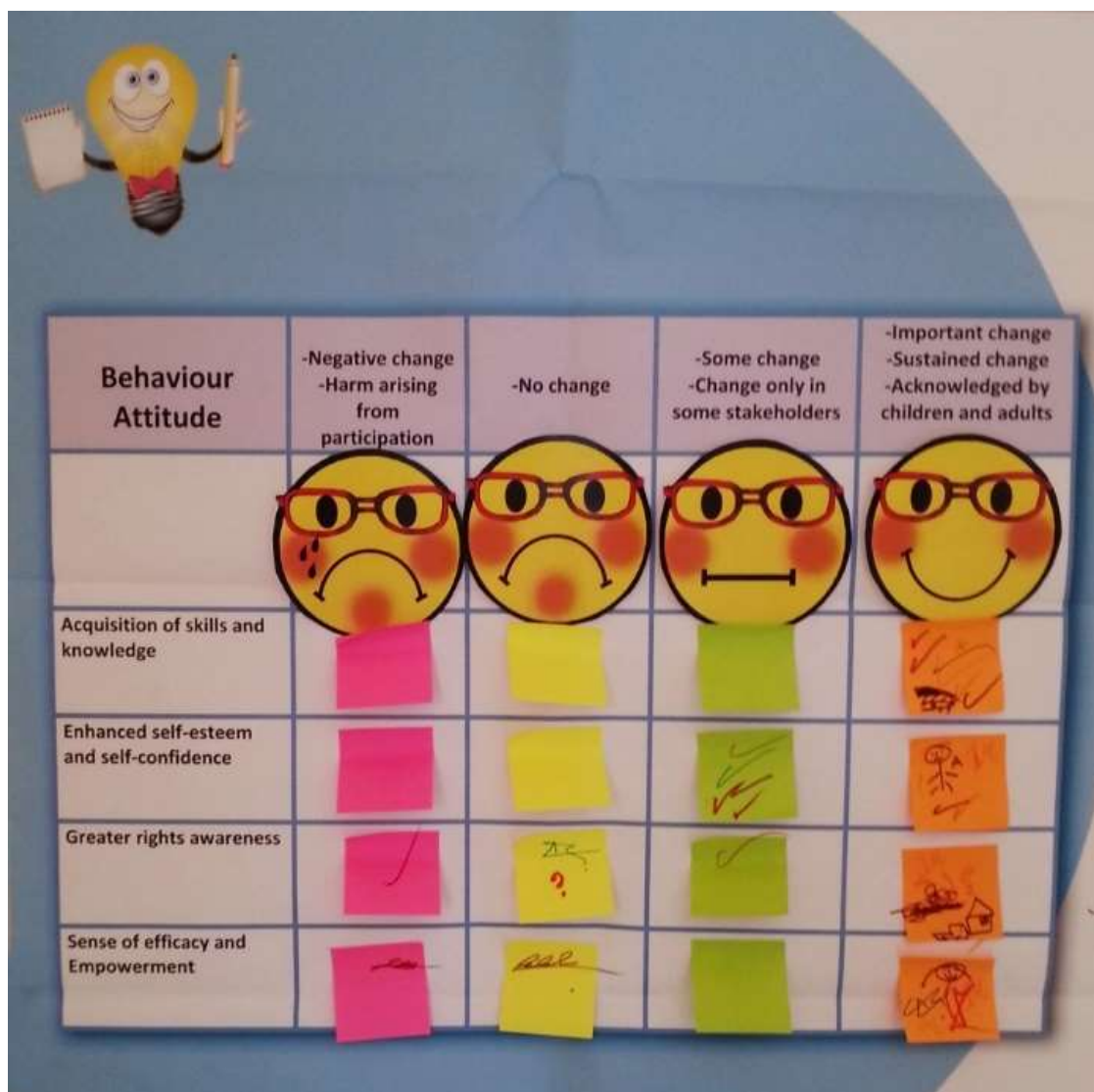
	Q7	Beside the changes in decision-making, what do you think are the benefits for the children as a result of participation in child-led research?	<p>Can you tell me more about the impact that can have at the personal level?</p> <p>Can you please give me a concrete example?</p> <p>If you do not believe that there are significant changes, can you please outline briefly the reasons?</p>
Reflections on personal experience	Q8	Based on your personal experience, do you think child-led research is an appropriate way to engage children in decision-making and have an impact?	I would to give you an example of a child-led report that children from Bangladesh produced and submitted to the UN Human Rights Council. They proposed three changes in policy regarding violence against children, gender equality and space for participation. What do you think about that? Effective? Meaningful? Tokenistic?
	Q9	Do you think there is a tension between autonomy and protection when children to engage their own child-led research?	How can we balance the desire of children to participate and the control that adults can have over their participation?
Closing		Is there anything else you think would be helpful to share with regard to this topic?	



## **10.5. Appendix E: Tools and icebreakers**

### **10.5.1. Learning from our experiences tool**

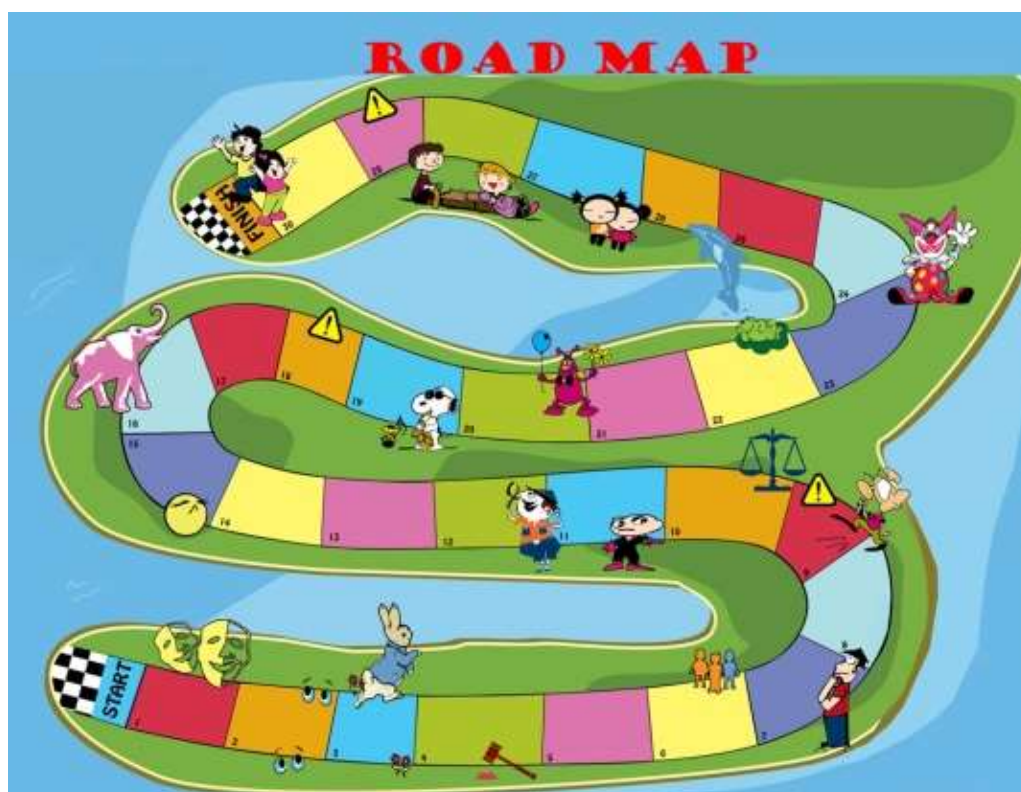
This tool, adapted from Lansdown and O’Kane (2014), is used to stimulate conversation among the participants in order to help them to visualise their perceptions about the negative or positive outcomes of their engagement in activities. Participants tick the column that represent their perceptions better. They then discuss collectively the scores given to each question.



### 10.5.2. Remembering our activities: road map tool

This tool is used to help children and young people to remember the details of the project that brought them together. As the child-led research was conducted between one and two year ago, they might have forgotten some components of the process or mixed them up with other activities conducted by the group. To start the activity, a road map tool is hanged on the wall, which is a board game with a start and finishing line. Participants receive a set of related photographs that illustrate the process that children and young people went through. The photographs show several situations that reflect different stages of the project and its activities. Children and

young people place the photographs in the road map tool in a chronological order. Participants have time to discuss the order of the photographs and reach consensus in case of disagreement. The discussion helps them to refresh their memories and to make their points during the focus group discussion. As a group, participants summarise the process, explain the order of photographs and add the information they consider was missing



### 10.5.3. Collaging ideas tool

This tool is used to help participants to express their experiences by creating a collage as a visual memoir. Participants receive coloured papers, magazines, newspapers, markers, scissors and glue. They are free to use any technique and available materials. Once they finish their collage, they come back to the circle and explain their collage. For those who do not want to do a collage, they are invited to write something or tell a short story. Doing nothing is also a valid option.



#### 10.5.4. Expressive circle icebreaker

- Children and young people choose a movement and a word that represent them (for instance flying as a bird, which represent freedom).
- They walk in a circle without any order, then the facilitator says “stop” and each participants facing each other says his/her own name and make the chosen movement.
- Children and young people repeat the circle again, and each time they face a new participants they repeat the name and movement until they meet all the children.
- Facilitator asks children young people to create a big circle and each child, one by one, enters into the centre of the circle. Other participants need to say the name and the movement of the child or young person who is in the middle and they need guess the meaning of the movement. The participant

confirms or denies and explains in detail why he/she chose that movement and the meaning.

- Once all the children and young people have entered into the circle, they go back where they were sat and the meeting starts.

## **10.6. Appendix F: Our joint rules**

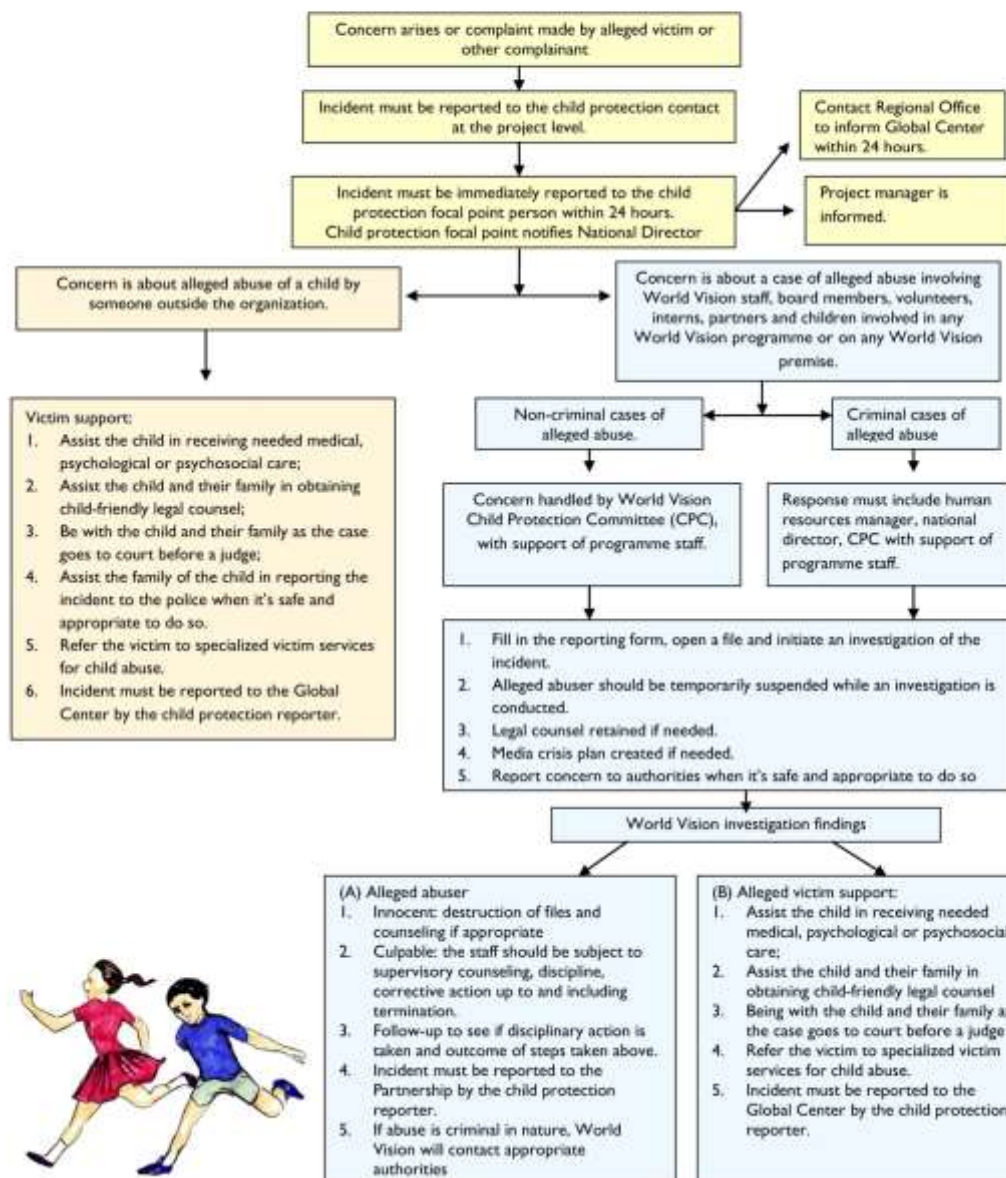
Joint rules agreed by the participants. This list was based on previous joint rules developed by children and young people. Child participants in the research discussed the rules and added new ones during the first session.

- ✓ Listen to each other
- ✓ Do not interrupt when someone is talking
- ✓ Raise your hand to speak
- ✓ Avoid side-talking and using the mobile
- ✓ Respect each other participants' comments

- ✓ No name calling or bullying
- ✓ Keep the opinions within the group and do not disseminate them beyond the participants
- ✓ Right not to answer questions if we do not want
- ✓ Right to ask for an explanation to the facilitator if we do not understand a question
- ✓ Have fun and enjoy the conversation
- ✓ Facilitator must be fun, smiley and supportive
- ✓ Facilitator needs to learn the names of all children and young people

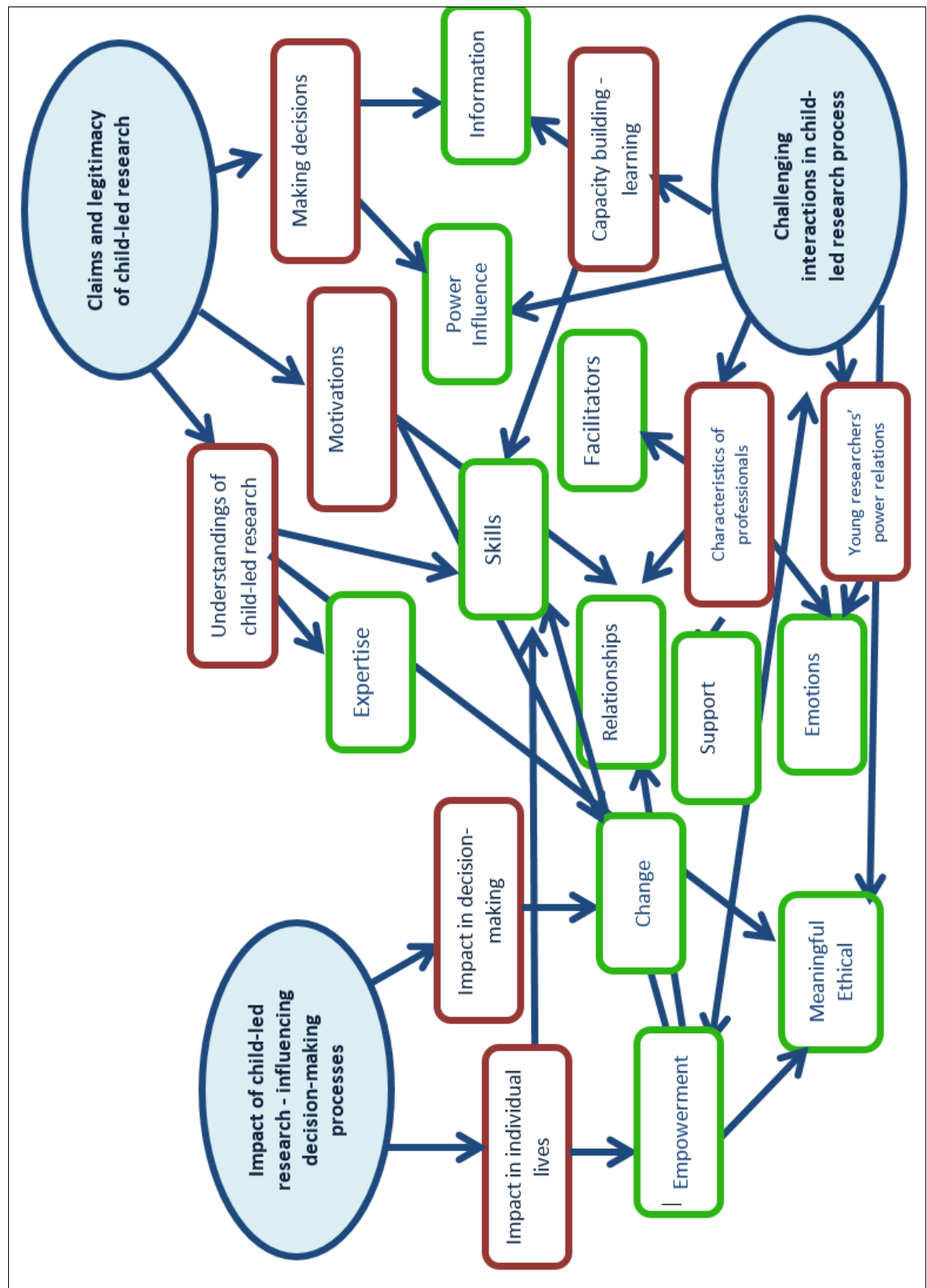
## **10.7. Appendix G: World Vision Child Protection Incident Procedure**

## Child Protection Incident Procedure





## 10.8. Appendix H: Codes and themes





## 10.9. Appendix I: Media coverage

### Girls not Brides website

The screenshot displays the Girls Not Brides website. At the top, the URL <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/reports-and-publications/uncertain-future-report-written-children-syria/> is visible. The website features a blue header with the 'GIRLS NOT BRIDES' logo. Below the header is a navigation bar with tabs: 'ABOUT CHILD MARRIAGE', 'GIRLS' VOICES', 'NEWS & ANALYSIS', 'WHAT WE DO', and 'TAKE ACTION'. Under 'ABOUT CHILD MARRIAGE', there are sub-links: 'WHERE', 'IMPACT', 'CAUSES', 'SOLUTIONS', 'LAW', 'REPORTS', and 'THEORY OF CHANGE'. The main content area shows a report titled 'OUR UNCERTAIN FUTURE. A REPORT WRITTEN BY THE CHILDREN OF SYRIA'. To the left of the title is a thumbnail image of the report cover. Below the title is a 'Download Report' button. A 'Summary' section follows, stating: 'To mark three years of the conflict in Syria, World Vision International invited children living as refugees to write a report to share, in their own words, their biggest concerns and to propose solutions. Across Lebanon and Jordan, 140 children responded. One of the key concerns that came out was being forced into an early marriage.' Below the summary is a box with metadata: 'Year Published: 2014', 'Type: Report', 'By: World Vision', 'Featured Countries: Syrian Arab Republic', 'Region: Middle East and North Africa', and 'Themes: Girls' safety, Conflict and humanitarian crises'. At the bottom of the page, there is a Windows taskbar with icons for Word, Internet Explorer, Skype, Adobe Reader, and other applications.

<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/reports-and-publications/uncertain-future-report-written-children-syria/>

**GIRLS NOT BRIDES**

**ABOUT CHILD MARRIAGE** **GIRLS' VOICES** **NEWS & ANALYSIS** **WHAT WE DO** **TAKE ACTION**

▸ WHERE ▸ IMPACT ▸ CAUSES ▸ SOLUTIONS ▸ LAW ▸ REPORTS ▸ THEORY OF CHANGE

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**OUR UNCERTAIN FUTURE. A REPORT WRITTEN BY THE CHILDREN OF SYRIA**

**SUMMARY**

To mark three years of the conflict in Syria, World Vision International invited children living as refugees to write a report to share, in their own words, their biggest concerns and to propose solutions.

Across Lebanon and Jordan, 140 children responded. One of the key concerns that came out was being forced into an early marriage.

**Year Published:** 2014  
**Type:** Report  
**By:** World Vision  
**Featured Countries:** Syrian Arab Republic  
**Region:** Middle East and North Africa  
**Themes:** Girls' safety, Conflict and humanitarian crises

## ALNAP website

org/resource/10857

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Strengthening humanitarian action through evaluation and learning

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### Children's Report: Stand With Me, Our Uncertain Future

**Downloads**

- Full report

**Web link**

- [reliefweb.int/report/jordan/children-s-report-stand-me-our-u...](http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/children-s-report-stand-me-our-u...)

**About this resource**

Resource type: [Research, reports and studies](#)  
 Language: [English](#)  
 Keywords: [Children & young people](#)  
 Countries: [Syria](#)  
 Agency: [World Vision](#)  
 Date published: March 2014  
 Pages: 22pp

"We fled the flames of war, only to find ourselves surrounded by danger, explosions, kidnapping, and theft. We are unable to live peacefully. We live in constant fear that something will happen and affect our life or hurt us," the children write in Our uncertain future, launched today.

Log in to add resources like this one to your account!

Tweet Share

## Syria Learning website

g.org/resource/10857

**Syria Evaluation Portal for Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning (CALL)**

Members of the CALL initiative include **ALNAP** and **InterAct**

### Children's Report: Stand With Me, Our Uncertain Future

**Downloads**

- Full report

**Web link**

- [reliefweb.int/report/jordan/children-s-report-stand-me-our-u...](http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/children-s-report-stand-me-our-u...)

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Resource type: [Research, reports and studies](#)  
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nagazine.org/story/syrian-refugee-children-we-live-constant-fear

## Syrian refugee children: 'We live in constant fear'

BY WED BATTLE AND BEVIL QMER / MAR 6, 2014



1 of 6

World Vision has so far supported close to 120,000 people with water, sanitation services, household supplies and healthcare in Syria and is providing assistance to 320,000 Syrian refugees and impacted host communities across Lebanon and Jordan, with a focus on the protection and well-being of children.

**S**yrian refugee children say they live in constant fear of violence and bullying and believe their futures are uncertain, a recent World Vision report cites.

To mark three years of the conflict in Syria, World Vision invited children living as refugees to write a report – to share, in their own words, their biggest concerns and to propose solutions. In Irbid, Jordan, and Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, 140 children



magazine.com.au/features/2347-syria-refugee-children-tell-of-the-hardships-of-war-in-new-world-vision-report-rel

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### SYRIA: REFUGEE CHILDREN TELL OF THE HARDSHIPS OF WAR IN NEW WORLD VISION REPORT RELEASED TO MARK THREE YEARS OF THE CONFLICT

13 March 2014

David Adams

Refugee children share the horrors they have been confronted with in Syria's ongoing civil war in a new report issued as the world marks the three year anniversary of the conflict this Saturday, 15th March.

The World Vision report, *Our Uncertain Future*, was written by 140 Syrian children aged between 10 and 17 who are now living as refugees in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon and Jordan. In it, they talk about the circumstances they now live in as refugees - in their homes, at school and in the wider communities where they live - as well as the horrors of what they faced in Syria and their hopes for the future.

"If I could, I would rebuild my country Syria. I would put back the smile on its face, without a drop of hatred or oppression, keeping the smiles and joy in the hearts of the innocent children who haven't experienced anything in this life except fear, horror, hunger and displacement," writes 16-year-old Hasan\*.

"Even though I lost hope in any future, still I will dream. My dreams are to continue my education in the field of law and to become a lawyer and defend the oppressed. I want to raise my voice to the entire



FACE OF CONFLICT: Israa. PICTURE: John Warren/World Vision

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#### MORE READING

[The Interview](#)





## The Journal website

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Tags: CHILDREN CIVIL WAR IN THEIR OWN WORDS REFUGEE CAMPS SCHOOL

**"A bomb came and frightened us": Syrian children reveal fears of violence, kidnapping and child marriage**

Over a million children have fled the country since the start of the conflict three years ago.

Mar 11th 2014, 6:30 AM 5,383 Views 25 Comments

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**The impact of war on children | Syrian Refugee Crisis**

Some might have their house destroyed.

(World Vision)

SYRIAN CHILDREN WHOSE families have fled the three-year-old conflict in the Middle

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[map.com/news/world-vision-new-r](#) [Stop Raising Awar...](#) [CPD Training – De...](#) [evac\\_voices\\_720p..](#)

Tools Help

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# New Report by Syrian Refugee Children Reveals Fear, Violence and Uncertainty in Host Countries

By World Vision On March 13, 2014

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Syrian children in Jordan work together to research, compile and write a child-led report focusing on the challenges facing refugees like themselves. PHOTO: Meg Sattler/World Vision

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[Tweet](#) [in Share](#) [Pin it](#)

Text size: [Small](#) [Medium](#) [Large](#)

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## CNN website - IReport

The screenshot shows a web browser window with several tabs open: "Stop Raisin...", "CPD Trainin...", "evac\_voices...", "Global Net...", "Syria Crisis: ...", and "M...". The browser's address bar is empty. The CNN iReport website is displayed, featuring a navigation bar with "News", "Video", "TV", "Opinions", and "More...". The main header includes the "CNN iReport" logo, a "Main" button, a "Explore" button, and a checkmark next to "Assignments". A red banner at the top of the content area says "Join the CNN Global Newsview panel" with a globe icon and the CNN logo. Below this is a video player showing a young man speaking. A "Click to play" button is overlaid on the video. The video has a "NOT VERIFIED BY CNN" label in the top left corner. The video's title is "Syrian teens speak out on the crisis and the impact on their families". Below the video, there are statistics: "52 VIEWS", "0 COMMENTS", and "0 SHARES". The "About this iReport" section states "Not verified by CNN" and "Posted March 11, 2014 by WorldVision1". The "Location" is "Beirut, Lebanon". The "Assignment" section shows a checkmark and the text "This iReport is part of an assignment: Impact Your World". The "More from WorldVision1" section lists three items: "Buddy, wet conditions offer preview of winter misery to come for Syrian refugee families in Lebanon", "A safe place to play for child refugees in Europe", and "31 refugees in Lebanon, 100,000 in Jordan, 100,000 in Syria". The "CNN PRODUCER NOTE" states: "WorldVision1, a Christian humanitarian organization, interviewed these Syrian teenagers in Lebanon and Jordan. -rachid, CNN iReport producer". The main text of the report reads: "Ahead of the 3rd anniversary of the Syrian crisis, World Vision worked with 140 teenagers, empowering them to research and write their own experiences". The video player has a subtitle that reads: "She was coming to school and I saw her running." The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows icons for "S", "PDF", "W", "e", and several system icons.

52 VIEWS 0 COMMENTS 0 SHARES

**Syrian teens speak out on the crisis and the impact on their families**

By WorldVision1 | Posted March 11, 2014 | Beirut, Lebanon

**CNN PRODUCER NOTE** WorldVision1, a Christian humanitarian organization, interviewed these Syrian teenagers in Lebanon and Jordan. -rachid, CNN iReport producer

Ahead of the 3rd anniversary of the Syrian crisis, World Vision worked with 140 teenagers, empowering them to research and write their own experiences

She was coming to school and I saw her running.

## Christian Post website

om/news/americans-overw

Stop Raisin... CPD Trainin... evac\_voices... Global Net... Syria Crisis: ... New Report...

help

Gallery

THE CHRISTIAN POST

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# Americans Overwhelmingly Believe Syrians Deserve US Help

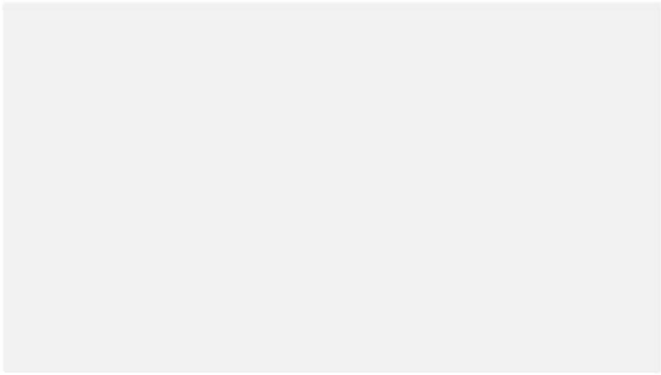
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BY STOYAN ZAIMOV, CHRISTIAN POST REPORTER

Mar 14, 2014 | 12:29 PM



More than three-quarters (76 percent) of Americans responding to a poll on Syria said the U.S. government should help the 9.3 million Syrians in need of humanitarian aid as a result of the ongoing civil war.

Among those who said they are familiar with the Syrian conflict, 47 percent said that increased humanitarian aid is one way the U.S. can help. The same percentage also voted for increased diplomatic pressure. Thirteen percent voted for military action and 14 percent suggested some




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## PRNewswire website

The screenshot shows the PRNewswire website with the URL [www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/poll-americans-think-hurricane-katrina-worse-crisis-than-syria-249579541.html](http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/poll-americans-think-hurricane-katrina-worse-crisis-than-syria-249579541.html). The page features a navigation bar with 'News', 'Solutions', and 'Resources'. Below the navigation bar, there are categories: 'News in Focus', 'Business & Money', 'Science & Tech', 'Lifestyle & Health', 'Policy & Public Interest', and 'People & Culture'. The main headline is 'Poll: Americans Think Hurricane Katrina Worse Crisis Than Syria'. Below the headline, there are three bullet points: '- Americans think Hurricane Katrina, Indian Ocean Tsunami and Haiti earthquake affected more people than the conflict in Syria', '- More than one-fifth of Americans are not at all familiar with the Syria conflict', and '- Of those familiar with the conflict, three-fourths think U.S. should help people affected in some way'. The date and time are 'Mar 11, 2014, 15:54 ET from World Vision U.S.'. There are social media sharing buttons for Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and Email. A large image placeholder is visible, showing a graphic with the text 'The new need, we need it.' and 'Journalists of'.

The screenshot shows the full text of the news release. The URL is the same as the previous screenshot. The text begins with 'saying they are 'not at all familiar' vs. 18 percent of those age 35+ who said the same).'. A bullet point follows: '• When it comes to why money may be hard to raise for humanitarian aid in response to the conflict in Syria, more than half of Americans (53 percent) think it's because money should go towards addressing problems in the U.S.'. The text continues: 'The poll comes as World Vision is releasing a new report completely written and researched by refugee children of the Syrian crisis, titled "Our Uncertain Future." In the report, children found that 86 percent of their peers have been exposed to violence. Several questioned why the world is not paying attention:'. A quote follows: 'If I had the opportunity to address people in power around the world, I would say: "Haven't you had enough of the destruction in Syria? Haven't you seen enough blood in Syria? Haven't you seen enough deaths in Syria? What else do you still need, to save us and bring us back to our country? If I had a magic wand, I would erase all the destruction that happened in Syria or in any other country and draw instead the best and most beautiful thing for everyone," said Hanadi, 17, a Syrian refugee.'. The text concludes: 'World Vision has been responding to the crisis in by helping people in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, supporting more than 300,000 with water, sanitation services, household supplies and healthcare, with a focus on the protection and well-being of children.'

## 10.10. Appendix J: Videos and blogs

Videos, photo gallery and blogs showcasing the child-led research on the World

Vision International's website:

- <http://wvi.org/syria-crisis/publication/our-uncertain-future>
- <http://wvi.org/syria-crisis/article/our-uncertain-future-children-behind-report>
- <http://wvi.org/world-vision-european-union/pressrelease/our-uncertain-future-new-report-written-syrian-refugee>
- <http://wvi.org/jordan/gallery/our-uncertain-future-making-report>
- [http://wvi.org/jordan/video/our-uncertain-future-children-behind-report.](http://wvi.org/jordan/video/our-uncertain-future-children-behind-report)

## 10.11. Appendix K: Summary of findings from child-led research projects

### *Dhaka case study*

The following paragraph is a summary of the main findings of the child-led research conducted by young researchers from the *Dhaka* case study:

- Data from the fieldwork show that 90% of people are aware of the birth registration process but only 53.33% had obtained their birth certificate.
- Interviews with research participants reveal that 72% of people perceived harassment during the birth registration process.
- Despite the fact that the birth certificate should be free of cost, people affirmed that they needed approximately Bangladeshi taka (BDT)250 to BDT1,000 to procure a birth registration certificate (GBP2.50 to GBP10) (This is due to corruption issues, in which officials request money despite the fact that certificate are for free).
- Data from the field reveal that many schools do not require birth registration as a prerequisite for admission and the main reason to get a birth registered was for marriage.

(Extracted from 'Birth registration for all children' report (Ghashful Child Forum and World Vision Bangladesh, 2017, p4)

The young researchers also included the following recommendations for action:

- Pre-primary schools can support the birth registration process by requiring birth registration certificates upon admission.
- The Office of the Registrar General must monitor that the local Birth and Death Registration departments do not charge fees for the birth registration process.
- Awareness-raising sessions must be conducted with families to educate them on the importance of registering births and the negative consequences that result from the lack of birth registration.

(Extracted from 'Birth registration for all children' report (Ghashful Child Forum and World Vision Bangladesh, 2017, p5)

## ***Bekaa and Irbid case study***

The following paragraph is a summary of the main findings of the child-led research conducted by young researchers from the *Bekaa and Irbid* case study:

### **Our Lives at Home**

- Parents are unable to provide basic domestic needs and family requirements. The luxurious life in Syria is no more than a dream now and the only concern has become how to get food.
- The ghost of forced early marriage looms. It has become a negative societal habit as many girls are getting married because of their family's financial burdens. Some girls are forced into early marriage against their will, to break the shackles of poverty. Parents are also marrying off girls out of fear for their safety and to protect their honour.
- The bad psychological state of parents make them unfit to listen to their children who are then forced to carry burdens far beyond their years as they have no one to talk to since their parents suffer even more than them.

### **Our Lives at School**

- Syrian children and young people attending school find it difficult to adapt and get along with others in this environment because they are routinely blamed for any problem that occurs at school because the teachers discriminate between local and Syrian students.
- Syrian child refugees are abused physically, verbally and morally. They are cursed and humiliated not just by the teachers but also by other students.
- The Lebanese and Syrian curricula are very different, making studying harder for refugee students because of the language barrier. An excellent student in Syria may become a failing student in Lebanon.

### **Our Lives in the Community**



- Parents face discrimination at work. The salary of a Syrian is not even half or one-quarter of the same salary of a Lebanese or Jordanian employee.
- Syrian young people suffer from violence in the streets. They are beaten up and cursed.
- Not all Lebanese and Jordanian people treat Syrian children and young people harshly, many are dear and loyal friends whom are loved a lot by the refugee children.

**Our lives in Home and Host Countries:**

- Working and studying in Lebanon requires identity papers, but most refugees do not have any because they were forced to leave Syria in haste.
- Syrian children and young people fear their uncertain futures the most. They are afraid they may never return home and may be stranded away from their country and home.

(Extracted from Our uncertain future report (World Vision, 2014a, p5-16)

## 10.12. Appendix L: Photographs from fieldwork sites

<i>Dhaka</i> case study (Bangladesh)		
		
<i>Bekaa and Irbid</i> case study (Lebanon)		
		
<i>Dhaka</i> case study (Jordan)		
		

## 10.13. Appendix M: Ethical Review Form



University of Edinburgh

School of Social and Political Studies

RESEARCH AND RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

### Ethical review form for level 2 and level 3 auditing

This form should be used for any research projects carried out under the auspices of SSPS that have been identified by self-audit as requiring detailed assessment - i.e. level 2 and level 3 projects (see <http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/research/ethics>). This form provides general School-wide provisions. Proposers should feel free to supplement these with detailed provisions that may be stipulated by research collaborators (e.g. NHS) or professional bodies (e.g. BSA, SRA). The signed and completed form should be submitted, along with a copy of the research proposal (or a description of the research goals and methodology where this is unavailable) to the relevant person:

- For staff applying for external funding, the PI should submit the form to Research Office
- For Postdoctoral Fellows, the Mentor should submit the form to Research Office
- For PG Research (PhD or MSc by Research), the Supervisor should submit the form to Director of the Graduate School.
- For UG Dissertations, the Supervisor should submit the form to the Programme/Dissertation Convenor.

Research and Research Ethics Committee will monitor level 2 proposals to satisfy themselves that the School Ethics Policy and Procedures are being complied with. They will revert to proposers in cases where there may be particular concerns or queries. For level 3 audits, work should not proceed until Research and Research Ethics Committee (or the Director of Graduate Studies, in the case of postdoctoral research) has considered the issues raised. Level 3 applications should be submitted well in advance of a required date of approval.

Research Office may monitor the implementation of arrangements for dealing with ethical issues through the lifetime of research projects. Please ensure you keep a record of how you are addressing ethics issues in the course of your research (e.g. consent forms, disclosure processes, storage of data, discussion of ethical issues by project advisory board). Do contact the Research Administrator if any unanticipated ethics issues arise in the course of your research/after the completion of your project.

## SECTION 1: PROJECT DETAILS

Title of Project

All opinions matter: Children and young people leading their own research

1.2 Principal Investigator, and any Co-Investigator(s) (Please provide details of Name, Institution, Email and Telephone)

Patricio Cuevas-Parra, PhD candidate in Social Policy,  
School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh  
Mobile: 07502069566  
Email : P.Cuevas-Parra@sms.ed.ac.uk

Does the sponsor require formal prior ethical review? YES ☐  
NO ☒

If yes, by what date is a response required

Does the project require the approval of any other institution and/or ethics committee?  
YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, give details and indicate the status of the application at each other institution or ethics committee (i.e. submitted, approved, deferred, rejected).

This project has been assessed using this checklist and is judged to be  
LEVEL2 ☒ (for information to Research Ethics Committee)<sup>2</sup>

LEVEL 3 ☐ (for discussion by Research Ethics Committee)

If Level 3, is there a date by which a response from the committee is required?

Name..... Signature.....

PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (OR ALTERNATIVELY A DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH)

## SECTION 2: POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS

2.1 Is it likely that the research will induce any psychological stress or discomfort?  
YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, state the nature of the risk and what measures will be taken to deal with such problems.

The nature of my research topic is positive as it explores the experiences of children and young people in conducting child-led research, which has been reported as successful and promising initiative. However, as most of the participants are children and young people from deprived communities, some of the issues covered by the research can have some impact on the psychological well-being of the participants. My research project is conducted in two sites, one in



Brazil and another in Lebanon. In both sites, children are young people who voluntarily participate in formal or semi-formal child-led groups under the sponsorship of World Vision, which is the research gatekeeper. This membership gives children and young people a supportive, safe and protective environment. Specialized and well-trained staff members work with both groups, which mitigate all the risks of any psychological stress or discomfort.

All participants will be invited to participate in the research in a free and voluntary basis. Information leaflet will be produced in the local language to inform participants about the research and their rights if they decide to join or not the research. This leaflet will also include information to reassure that their participation is not conditioned to the access to the services provided by the gatekeeper. During the interview sessions (one-to-one semi structured interviews or focus groups), I will explain issues around confidentiality and anonymity in order to create a safe environment. I will also explain that they have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research without any consequence. The informed consent is understood as an ongoing process and not one-off.

In order to create an environment of trust with children and young people, I will introduce myself as independent researcher and give information about myself which can be interested for them. I will be using an easy and accessible language for child participants. Information pack will be distributed to participants with contact details of me and the gatekeeper staff members.

Interview sessions will include ice-breaking, warm-up, energiser and cool down activities to ensure that participants feel they are in a relaxed and non-threatening environment.

2.2 Does the research require any physically invasive or potentially physically harmful procedures? YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, give details and outline procedures to be put in place to deal with potential problems.

2.3 Does the research involve sensitive topics, such as participants' sexual behaviour, illegal activities, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, or their ethnic status? YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, give details.

As mentioned above, participants from both sites are from vulnerable populations and live under the poverty line. Participants, aged 12 to 17, are members of two child-led organizations and in their weekly meetings they discuss issues about exclusion, poverty, and violence among other social justice issues. All the discussions are facilitated by specialised staff members. The research does not include questions about personal experiences on those topics but explores how children and young people engage in child-led research and what the issues that they interested in researching.

The gatekeeper will assign a specialised staff member to assist me in case some issues that make participants uncomfortable or stressed arise. I will liaise with this staff member in order to have information about a referral system, access to legal or psychosocial support if needed, and an overview the local procedures in place.

- 2.4 Is it likely that this research will lead to the disclosure of information about child abuse or neglect or other information that would require the researchers to breach confidentiality conditions agreed with participants? YES ☐  
NO ☒

If YES, indicate the likelihood of such disclosure and your proposed response to this.

The research participants are children and young people who participate in many activities around social justices issues, including discrimination, violence and abuse. Many of them are not subjected of abuse or violence but they are sensible to these issues and want to make a change in their communities and they might disclose information about child abuse that affects them or others. In case a disclosure occurs, I will liaise with the gatekeeper specialised staff member who will be assigned to this research project in order to address the situation and identify the next steps. The gatekeeper has a formal procedure and protocol in case of disclosure of child protection concerns, which includes reporting, investigation and remedial actions. As all the participants are sponsored by the gatekeeper, I will able to use the gatekeeper procedures and will be assisted by them to know the legal local context, the implications for my research and the actions required.

As a researcher, I will not deal directly with issues disclosed, as I am not a therapist or investigator, but the gatekeeper will assign the specialised staff members to assist me to deal with the situation from legal, medical or psychological perspectives. The gatekeeper has extensive experience in these cases and have partnered with many external researchers, so they have a good system in place in case of disclosure of child protection concerns or incidents.

During the introductory sessions with child and young people, while presenting the confidentiality principles, I will explain to the participants that there is an exception to confidentiality when there is significant danger or risk for the participants or to any other young person. This information will be also included in the in the informed consent procedure, so participants are aware of that arrangement.

If there is a real risk of such disclosure triggering an obligation to make a report to Police, Social Work or other authorities, a warning to this effect must be included in the Information and Consent documents.

- 2.5 Is it likely that the research findings could be used in a way that would adversely affect participants or particular groups of people? YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, describe the potential risk for participants of this use of the data. Outline any steps that will be taken to protect participants.

I believe it is unlikely that the findings could harmfully affect participants. In order to minimise potential issues, nobody will access to the raw data except me. Interpreters and transcribers will sign a confidentiality agreement. Confidentiality and anonymity are two key principles that this research follows. Data will be anonymised by removing all identifiers.

2.6 Is it likely that participation in this research could adversely affect participants in any other way? YES ☐ NO **X** ☐

If YES, give details and outline procedures to be put in place to deal with such problems.

It is unlikely that this research produces that. However, in order to assess the potential risks I will using a reflexive lens to analyse potential issues and will engage with the gatekeeper and my supervisor to address them accordingly. One of the issues that might arise is the stigmatisation of children and young people as poor people from the slams. Based on my experience as practitioner, children and young people don't want to be stigmatised or portrayed as poor and vulnerable people, they just want to be regular people without labels. I will be taking this and other factor into consideration during the writing-up and dissemination phases.

2.7 Is this research expected to benefit the participants, directly or indirectly?  
YES **X** ☐ NO ☐

If YES, give details.

Directly, this research project will benefit participants by giving them the space to share their experiences and provide their suggestions to improve the projects and any other ideas they have in mind. In my experience as practitioner, children and young people feel valued and empowered when they are invited to participate in research, especially if the methodologies are sensitive to their needs. This research uses an empowering approach that focuses on the abilities and capacities of participants as social actors who can speak up and to take positive actions to make things happen.

Indirectly, the findings of the research will be used to improve the projects where children and people participate. The findings and recommendations will be shared with the gatekeeper and children and young people. The organisation will tackle the way forward but children will have a key role in making them accountable for the changes that they want to see in their projects.

2.8 Will the true purpose of the research be concealed from the participants?  
YES ☐ NO **X** ☐

If YES, explain what information will be concealed and why. Will participants be debriefed at the conclusion of the study? If not, why not?

### SECTION 3: POTENTIAL RISKS TO THE RESEARCHER/S

3.1 Is the research likely to involve any psychological or physical risks to the researcher, and/or research assistants), including those recruited locally?

YES ☐ NO X ☒

If Yes, explain what measures will be taken to ensure adequate protection/support.

#### SECTION 4: PARTICIPANTS

4.1 How many participants is it hoped to include in the research?

This research includes 8 adults and 40 children and young people, aged 12 to 17. In Lebanon are 15 children and young people and 4 adults. In Brazil are 25 children and young people and 4 adults.

4.2 What criteria will be used in deciding on the inclusion and exclusion of participants in the study?

Participants will be chosen based on their level of engagement in their local projects, their roles and functions within their constituencies, and their experiences in the subject studied. The recruitment also considers features such as age, gender and ethnicity

4.3 Are any of the participants likely to:

be under 18 years of age? YES X ☒

NO ☐

be looked after children (including those living in local authority care or those living at home with a legal supervision requirement)?

YES ☐

NO X ☒

be physically or mentally ill?

YES ☐

NO X ☒

have a disability?

YES X ☒

NO ☐

be members of a vulnerable or stigmatized minority?

YES X ☒

NO ☐

- be unlikely to be proficient in English? YES ☒ NO ☐
- be in a client or professional relationship with the researchers? YES ☐ NO ☒
- be in a student-teacher relationship with the researchers? YES ☐ NO ☒
- be in any other dependent relationship with the researchers? YES ☐ NO ☒
- have difficulty in reading and/or comprehending any printed material distributed as part of the research process? YES ☒ NO ☐
- be vulnerable in other ways? YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES to any of the above, explain and describe the measures that will be used to protect and/or inform participants.

As mentioned, this research project includes 40 participants under the age of 18. All of them are from disadvantage families and many of them experience several vulnerabilities simultaneously. I have been in contact with the gatekeeper in order to identify their particular needs in advance and facilitate the inclusion of all participants regardless their abilities or any other factor. Since the research will be conducted in Lebanon and Brazil, it is anticipated that participants will speak only their local languages. In order to address the language barrier, professional interpreters will be provided in both sites to ensure meaningful dialogue between the participants and me, as the researcher. Consent forms and information leaflets will be produced in the local language. These materials will be produced in a child-friendly and accessible way. In case some participants are not able to read or to understand the information, specialised local staff members will assist me to convey the information in a sensitive manner to the participants needs. I will work closely with the gatekeeper to understand and respect the cultural sensitivities of the participants such as religion, values, beliefs, ethnic heritage, language, etc. This information will give me the knowledge to reflect on the challenges and issues that participants face and minimised them accordingly. The costs of transportation, meals and hospitalities will be covered by this research project in order to facilitate the participation of children and young people, without creating a financial burden for the families.

Do the researchers need to be cleared through the Disclosure (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) Scheme? See [http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/pvg/pvg\\_index.html](http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/pvg/pvg_index.html) YES ☐  
NO ☒

Will it be difficult to ascertain whether participants are vulnerable in any of the ways listed above (e.g. where participants are recruited via the internet)? YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, what measures will be used to verify the identity of participants, or protect vulnerable participants?

4.4 How will the sample be recruited?

The participants will be recruited by the researcher with the support of World Vision, which is the gatekeeper. Participants are children and young people who engaged in child-led research and are member of child-led associated sponsored by the gatekeeper. Adult participants will also be recruited with the assistance of the gatekeeper, some of them are facilitator and other decision-makers. All participants will be provided with information about the research project, and informed consent will be requested. I will make sure that the participation will be voluntary and free.

4.5 Will participants receive any financial or other material benefits because of participation?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, what benefits will be offered to participants and why?

Participants will not be offered any kind of monetary compensation for their participation in the research in order to prevent coercion or undue influence (Grant and Sugarman, 2004). Nevertheless, based on conversations with the gatekeeper it seems appropriate with give some gifts to participants at the end of the research to thank their participation and acknowledge their valuable contribution.

**Before completing Sections 5 & 6 please refer to the University Data Protection Policy to**

ensure that the relevant conditions relating to the processing of personal data under Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 are satisfied. Details are Available at:

[www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk](http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk)

**SECTION 5: CONFIDENTIALITY AND HANDLING OF DATA**

5.1 Will the research require the collection of personal information from e.g. universities, schools, employers, or other agencies about individuals without their direct consent?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, state what information will be sought and why written consent for access to this information will not be obtained from the participants themselves.

5.2 Does the research involve the collection of sensitive data (including visual images of respondents) through the internet? YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, describe measures taken to ensure written consent for access to this information.

5.3 Will any part of the research involving participants be audio/film/video taped or recorded using any other electronic medium?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, what medium is to be used and how will the recordings be used?

I will be using an audio-recorder to record the interviews and focus groups. Children, young people and adults will be asked their agreements to audio-record the interviews. In case they decline, I will take hand-written notes. I will explain to the participants that the data will be anonymised and all identifiers will be removed such names, last names, location, etc. Photographs and videos can probably be used to document the research process, however, this will be negotiated with the participants and gatekeeper in order to ensure that feel comfortable. In addition, the photographs and videos will not have any personal data associated with them.

5.4 Who will have access to the raw data?

Myself, as the main researcher, the transcribers, and interpreters. They will sign a confidentiality agreement prior to starting work on the research project. My supervision will also have access to the data, which will be anonymised at that stage.

5.5 Will participants be identifiable, including through internet searches? YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, how will their consent to quotations/identifications be sought?

5.6 If not, how will anonymity be preserved?

Participants will be identified only the gender and age. If some participants do not want any type of identification, gender and age will be removed from the notes. Identifiers such as the name of the organisation, community premises or location will be removed from the notes. In case, children and young people want to be recognised for their participation and contribution to the research, I will have a reflexive analysis with the gatekeeper and participants in order to find a common ground. The use of pseudonyms will be negotiated as an option. Data will be anonymised once transcribed and pseudonyms will be added in the kept files. I will

explain to participants that I will never reveal full identity of participants such as names and family names.

- 5.7 Will the datafiles/audio/video tapes, etc. be disposed of after the study? YES ☒ NO ☐

The information will be destroyed at the end of the study in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

- 5.8 How long they will be retained?

Data files and audio records will be destroyed six months after the successful completion of the research.

- 5.9 How will they eventually be disposed of?

Data will be deleted from the computer and disposed from the University server.

- 5.10 How do you intend for the results of the research to be used?

The primary audience for this research study includes: PhD supervisor and examiners, gatekeeper, child and young participant involved in this research as well as academic staff members and peers at the University of Edinburgh as this is a doctoral research study. The secondary audience is comprised of academics and researchers in the field of participation, child-focused civil society organisations, practitioners, decision and policy-makers, media and relevant stakeholders.

- 5.11 Will feedback of findings be given to participants? YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, how and when will this feedback be provided?

The research participants will be provided with a summary of the final report in their local languages which will contain information relevant to them. This will be done within six months after the conclusion of the research.

## SECTION 6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT

- 6.1 Will written consent be obtained from participants?  
YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, attach a copy of the information sheet and consent forms.

In some contexts of ethnographic research, written consent may not be obtainable or may not be meaningful. If written consent will NOT be obtained, please explain why circumstances make obtaining consent problematic.

The informed consent for children and their parents has a written form. However, in case any issues arise, such as illiteracy of participants or parents or mistrust of written documents, measures will be taken in order to assess the individual



situations and remedial actions will be implemented such as the replacement of written consent for a verbal one which is then recorded on the documents or audio-recorded.

Administrative consent may be deemed sufficient:

a) for studies where the data collection involves aggregated (not individual) statistical information and where the collection of data presents:

- (i) no invasion of privacy;
- (ii) no potential social or emotional risks:

b) for studies which focus on the development and evaluation of curriculum materials, resources, guidelines, test items, or programme evaluations rather than the study, observation, and evaluation of individuals.

6.2 Will administrative consent be obtained in lieu of participants' consent? YES ☐  
NO ☒

If YES, explain why individual consent is not considered necessary.

In the case of research in online spaces or using online technology to access participants, will consent be obtained from participants?

If YES, explain how this consent will be obtained.

If NO, give reasons.

This research projects does not consider online spaces or the use of online technology to access participants. All participants will be recruited and will participate in face-to-face sessions.

6.3 In the case of children under 16 participating in the research on an individual basis, will the consent or assent of parents be obtained? YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, explain how this consent or assent will be obtained.

Parents or - in their absence - caregivers will be contacted in order to obtain their informed consent. A consent form and an information leaflet will be developed and distributed to the parents or caregivers in the local language. The child protection policy of the gatekeeper indicates that consent from one of the parents is a requirement for participants under the age of 18 to participate in research and consultations.

If NO, give reasons.

6.4 Will the consent or assent (at least verbal) of children under 16 participating in the research on an individual basis be obtained? YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, explain how this consent or assent will be obtained.

All children and young people who will participate in the research project will be asked to provide informed consent. Participants will receive information leaflet and consent form in their local language. The layout and language will be child-friendly and sensitive to children's needs. In case children and young people have problems understanding the terms of the information leaflet or consent form, I will explain them in detail the content of both documents. I will be assisted in this task by the gatekeeper specialised staff members who have experience in working with this population. When challenges arise such as illiteracy of participants or mistrust of written documents, I will take measures in order to assess the individual situations and remedial actions will be implemented such as the replacement of written consent for a verbal one which is then recorded on the documents or audio-taped.

If NO, give reasons.

6.5 In the case of participants whose first language is not English, will arrangements be made to ensure informed consent?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, what arrangements will be made?

It is anticipated that most of the participants will not speak English as the sites are in Brazil and Lebanon. The consent form and information leaflet will be provided in local language. In addition, further support will be provided to those who do not read or write their own local language.

If NO, give reasons.

6.6 In the case of participants with disabilities (e.g. learning difficulties or mental health problems), will arrangements be made to ensure informed consent?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If YES, what arrangements will be made?

For those participants who have learning difficulties or mental health problems, support will be provided by the specialised local staff members will assist me to convey the information in a sensitive manner. In order to anticipate the cases, I have requested the gatekeeper to identify the potential or actual needs of participants with disabilities. Based on that information we will plan accordingly and to prepare a tailored consent form process.

If NO, give reasons.

6.7 Many funders encourage making datasets available for use by other researchers. Will the data collected in this research be made available for secondary use?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, what arrangements are in place to ensure the consent of participants to secondary use?

## SECTION 7: Unplanned/unforeseen problems

7.1 Is the research likely to encounter any significant ethical risks that cannot be planned for at this stage? YES ☐ NO **X** ☒

If YES, please indicate what arrangements are being made to address these as they arise in the course of the project.

I do not anticipate any significant ethical risks which have not been covered in this document. However, in the likelihood that some new ethical risks emerge, I will constantly be assessing the situation and taking actions to address or minimise those risks. The ethical considerations are key components of my research reflexive process. I have a strong commitment to the ethics practice.

## SECTION 8: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The University has a 'Policy on the Conflict of Interest', which states that a conflict of interest would arise in cases where an employee of the University might be "compromising research objectivity or independence in return for financial or non-financial benefit for him/herself or for a relative or friend." See:

[http://www.docs.csg.ed.ac.uk/HumanResources/Policy/Conflict\\_of\\_Interest.pdf](http://www.docs.csg.ed.ac.uk/HumanResources/Policy/Conflict_of_Interest.pdf)

Conflict of interest may also include cases where the source of funding raises ethical issues, either because of concerns about the moral standing or activities of the funder, or concerns about the funder's motivation for commissioning the research and the uses to which the research might be put.

The University policy states that the responsibility for avoiding a conflict of interest, in the first instance, lies with the individual, but that potential conflicts of interest should always be disclosed, normally to the line manager or Head of Department. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest or to cease involvement until the conflict has been resolved may result in disciplinary action and in serious cases could result in dismissal.

8.1 Does your research involve a conflict of interest as outlined above  
YES ☐ NO **X** ☒

If YES, give details.



